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# The question of miracles

George Hayward  
Joyce

1. *Memoranda*

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**THE QUESTION OF MIRACLES.**

ROEHAMPTON ;  
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# THE QUESTION OF MIRACLES

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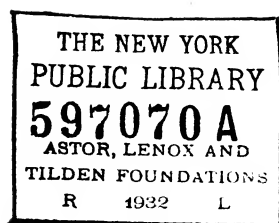
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## INTRODUCTION.

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THE Christian religion has ever professed itself to be a religion of miracles. Its early documents assure us that a series of miracles ushered in the life of its Founder, and that His public ministry was marked by the continuous exercise of supernatural power. We are told that He pointed to these works in confirmation of His teaching: and, further, that He made special appeal to a crowning miracle—His own Resurrection—which should be for all time an irresistible attestation of the truth of His claims. To that event the Church has ever pointed as the foundation of her belief. Moreover, if the New Testament writings are to be believed, He endowed His apostles with similar powers: and these they exercised in a manner which leaves no doubt as to their reality.

The miraculous element in Christianity is in accordance with its internal character as a religion. For the Christian revelation is no mere ethical system. It claims to be nothing short of a vast inrush of supernatural forces upon the human race, elevating man to a new plane of being, and conferring upon him an altogether new destiny. According to Christian belief, by the Incarnation and the Atonement, man is raised to sonship to God: his soul becomes the seat of a divine indwelling: and through membership in Christ's body he receives the pledge of an eternal beatitude to which his nature gives him no claim. Thus Christianity as a religion supposes that God has superseded the natural order

on man's behalf. And considered in the light of these truths, external miracle appears but the congruous expression of the tremendous spiritual transformation.

Such, speaking historically, is the relation of the Christian faith to miracles. At the present day, however, the claim is made to hold a "non-miraculous Christianity"—to profess Christianity and at the same time to dispense with all belief in the miraculous. This attitude may be said to be one of the leading characteristics of liberal Protestantism. Among German Protestant theologians it is almost universal. Those who, like Zahn and Seeberg, still hold the historic reality of the New Testament miracles are few indeed—*rari nantes in gurgite vasto*.

✓ In England the movement has been less rapid; yet every year sees it find more and more support among Anglican and Nonconformist divines. It is the standpoint of some of the writers both in *Contentio Veritatis* and in *Foundations*—books admittedly representative of certain aspects at least of Oxford thought. In *Contentio Veritatis* we are told that to admit a suspension of natural law "would destroy all the criteria both of scientific and historical reasoning." And in both works we find belief in the bodily resurrection of our Lord rejected on the ground of its miraculous character. Mr. Thompson's *Miracles of the New Testament* did but put in plain language what others expressed with somewhat more reserve.

We need not be at a loss to account for this development. The last two centuries have been

marked by the rise of several schools of thought, which, notwithstanding their many differences, have at least this in common, that they one and all hold the universe of experience to be a closed system, admitting of no interference from without. With all of them it is a postulate that the chain of causes and effects which experience reveals is never broken. The Deism of the seventeenth century, the Transcendental Idealism of Kant, the Positivism of J. S. Mill, the Scientific Materialism of Tyndall, and the more recent forms of Neo-hegelianism are at one as regards this. Each of these philosophical fashions has had a wide influence on the thought of the day. And just in so far as a man adopts any one of them, the idea of supernatural interference becomes impossible. Miracles must go. They must go, not because of any new light upon the evidence, but on grounds that are purely metaphysical.

These tendencies have found no foothold within the Catholic Church. In her teaching there is no hesitation or ambiguity. She points, as she has ever pointed, to the miracles of Christ as one of the firmest grounds of our belief in His claims. And she asserts with confidence that the age of miracles is not past, but that God still manifests His power by such events. Nevertheless, since the denial of the miraculous is so wide-spread among our Protestant fellow-countrymen, it appeared to the present writer that there was room for a work on this subject. His effort in the following pages has been to shew how untenable are the objections urged against miracles and how overwhelming is the evidence for their actual occurrence.



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## CHAPTER I.

### THE TRUE IDEA OF A MIRACLE.

Definition of a Miracle—Miracles and the Laws of Nature—Miracles in Relation to the Moral Order—  
a False View of Miracles.

WHAT precisely do we understand by a miracle? The definition of the term given in Murray's *Dictionary of the English Language* is as follows:—  
“ A marvellous event, occurring within human experience, which cannot have been brought about by human power or any natural agency, and must therefore be ascribed to the intervention of the Deity or of some supernatural being: chiefly an act (*e.g.*, of healing) exhibiting control over the laws of nature, and serving as evidence that the agent is either divine or is specially favoured by God.” No one, we think, will deny that this definition expresses with fair accuracy the idea men intend to convey when they speak of a miracle. In one point, however, it falls short of what is signified by the term in Catholic Theology. For it seems to suppose that miracles may proceed from supernatural beings other than God Himself. The teaching of Catholic theologians is that a miracle strictly so-called, that is an act involving direct control over the laws of nature, necessarily requires the exercise of Divine power: and that if a created being should work a miracle, this can only be through the intervention of God. They do not, of course, deny that certain astonishing events can

be brought about by other beings of a supernatural character. On the contrary, they hold that such events do from time to time take place. Of these marvels and of the means by which they are to be distinguished from genuine miracles we shall have something to say later. Here it is sufficient to note that the two classes may be distinguished.

In order to make good our view as to the true idea of a miracle, it will be necessary to consider briefly what is really meant by a law of nature. Indeed an explanation as to this point is an indispensable preliminary to all controversy regarding miracles. To discuss the possibility of the exception without first determining the character of the rule, can hardly be expected to lead to satisfactory results. Yet this unfortunately has often been the course actually pursued.

The universe, as daily experience bears witness, is not a chaos of objects unrelated one to another, but is organized in a series of types. Each individual belonging to any one of these possesses properties similar to those of all other examples of that type. In the same circumstances they all act in the same way. It is scarcely necessary to give instances of a fact so familiar. Water wherever found will freeze at 32 deg. F., and given the due atmospheric pressure, will boil at 212 deg. F. Nitric acid, when applied to a normal human skin, will always exercise a cauterizing effect. So too in regard to objects endowed with life, whether vegetable or animal. Trees of the same species will always produce fruit of the same sort and wood of similar texture. Caterpillars of the

same kind pass into the same butterfly. These uniformities we call laws of nature: and a law of nature is commonly defined as "a uniform mode of acting which a natural agent observes when under the same circumstances." The natural types of which we have spoken are arranged in genera and species: and thus it comes about that some laws of nature are common to all material substances, as *e.g.*, the laws of motion: others are proper to all living things: others proper to animals: and so on, according as the properties are generic or specific.

It is to be noted that the terms "agent" and "acting" employed in the definition of a law of nature are to be understood as including the manner in which an object behaves, when it might more accurately be said to be acted upon than to act. It may, for instance, seem almost a misnomer to call such a property as the ductility of a metal a mode of "acting." It is properly speaking not an active property of the metal in question, but a capacity by virtue of which other causes can act upon it. It is the ductility of certain metals which enables man to turn them to all manner of purposes, useful and aesthetic. Were it not for this we could not fashion them into coin of the realm nor into men-of-war. Properties such as these we shall speak of as passive properties. On the other hand, many properties clearly imply active causality. It is an active property of the oak that it produces acorns. Colour is an active property exerting an effect upon the optic nerve. So too is the resistency of a stone, in virtue of which the lowest tier of a building supports the whole

superstructure. We need not stay to inquire whether any property is either purely active or purely passive. In its broad lines the difference between the two is plain enough. And we desire to call attention to the distinction as one of which it is important to take note.

It may be objected that not all nature's laws are equally stable. New varieties of plants occasionally arise: and it is held by many that both the animal and vegetable kingdoms are originally descended from a few original types. But if a seedling develops into a plant possessing new characteristics, this does not shew that the law as previously conceived was not rightly so called. It only proves that within the type lay concealed the potentiality of developing under certain circumstances in this new direction. The same principle holds good in regard to mineral substances. When life first appeared on the earth, it must have seemed that the laws of nature regarding mineral substances were altered. In point of fact the potentiality of this new action had always existed: but the condition for its actualization, viz., the presence of vital agents capable of assimilating mineral substances, was wanting.

Man's control over nature lies in the employment of its active and passive powers. He cannot add to these; he cannot alter them. He cannot make an acorn grow into a pear tree, nor induce an ostrich to lay an egg like that of the emu. He cannot give tin the specific gravity of copper, nor bring it about that lead shall crystallize in the same form as bismuth. These properties are the original en-

dowment of the material universe. \ They spring from the will of Him Who made heaven and earth. He imparted them when He formed the world and called into being its various orders. He gave to each order its distinctive qualities, assigning the limits alike of its active powers and of its passive potentialities, and thus establishing the laws of nature. \

By a miracle properly so called we understand an event involving a change in this order of things. It is a miracle if an object receives an entirely new active power, which it did not previously possess, and in regard to which it possesses no potentiality. It is a miracle if an effect is produced, where indeed there is a real potentiality, but where the result is produced not by the normal development of the potentiality but *per saltum*. It is a miracle if an active power really present and in the circumstances which would naturally involve its activity is withheld from producing its effect. Clearly if events such as we have indicated should take place, they can proceed only from the will of the Creator Himself. Only the power that established these laws can alter them. Nor can anyone who believes in the divine omnipotence doubt that God can do this. In creating the world He gave it the properties and forces it now has. The same power that gave them can add to them or suspend their operation. There are, of course, objections which are urged against the idea of such changes, and which will be duly considered in a later chapter; but they are not based on any denial of God's power to effect them. Here we are only concerned to point out

that there are certain events, which if they occur at all, can only be the work of God. It is these we denote by the name of "miracle."

There is another point to be noted regarding the laws of nature. The word "law" has several distinct senses. Its meaning is very different when used of a law of nature and of a law of the land. In the latter sense the term signifies a decree—an expressed volition of the ruling authority obligatory on those subjects to whom it refers. It is operative through becoming known to them and receiving on their part intelligent obedience. It is altogether otherwise as regards physical law. The members of a natural species do not act similarly to one another because of the existence of a single decree, which they acknowledge and obey. In this case the operative cause in each agent is a quality proper to and inherent in the individual. This does not imply that the members of a class have nothing in common but a name. As we have already pointed out, they are all representative of a single type to which they conform: and in the case of living creatures that type is transmitted by the process of generation. But the determining force in each case is proper to the particular agent. It is not common to the class, as is the case where political laws are concerned. We call the uniformities of nature laws by analogy alone: and no little confusion may arise if this distinction is not borne in mind. For instance, Hume's well-known definition of a miracle speaks of it as "a transgression of a law of nature by a particular volition of the Deity." The phrase "transgression of a law" suggests that

when a miracle occurs there is opposition between some decree binding on the class, and the miraculous exception. Such an idea is, of course, misleading. There is indeed an exception to nature's uniformity. But the exception merely affects an individual quality: it does not violate any divine decree.

Hitherto we have been considering miracles purely in relation to physical law. This aspect of them, however, taken by itself is far from giving the complete idea of a miracle; and this it is the object of the present chapter to attain. Indeed, had they no other aspect than this it would be difficult to assign an adequate reason for such events. For viewed purely as exceptions to law they appear as a discord in Nature's harmony—in that marvellous order which God has impressed upon creation. And indeed many of those who reject the miraculous do so because they have never regarded them in any other light than this. They forget that the physical is not the only order: that the world is also the scene of a moral order, no less the work of God than the physical. That order too has its laws. They are proclaimed by the conscience of every rational being. It is true that their working is conditioned by the free-will of man. But they are no less immutable, and they exact their consequences no less inexorably than do physical laws. As the physical order is designed for the perfection of material Nature, so the moral government of God is directed to the perfecting of souls.

In regard to the relation between these two



orders it is evident that the moral is the higher of the two. What is material is lower than what is spiritual. And it is equally plain that taken by itself and apart from providential direction, the physical system is not always conducive to the interests of the moral order. Physical law is exemplified in the victory of big battalions over small. But the big battalions have not always been on the side of right. If the physical system of Nature tended to the triumphs of moral ends, many a ruffian's life would be speedily cut short by sickness. We need not then feel surprise that in certain cases God should for the sake of the higher order bring about exceptions in the lower. The government of the world must be viewed in its totality. That which if we considered the physical system alone, might be an inexplicable discord, may well have its appropriate place in the complete harmony of the two systems.

Whether miracles would have been granted to man if he had been left to the guidance of a purely natural religion and without the positive revelation of divine truth, we can hardly say. It does not seem impossible. The ordinary working of Nature reveals the existence of God; and man should be able to rise from the creature to the Creator. Yet such is the proneness of the human mind to go astray on this greatest of questions that what ought to reveal God may lead men to forget Him. Archbishop Trench has well said: "Were there no other purpose in miracles than this, namely to testify to the liberty of God, which however it habitually shews itself in Nature, is yet more than and above

Nature, were it only to break a link in that chain of cause and effect, which else we should come to regard as itself God . . . they would serve a great purpose."<sup>1</sup> But in point of fact miracles are presented to our consideration not as part of natural religion but in connexion with a supernatural revelation. And in this connexion the function of a miracle is evident. They are the appropriate instrument of revelation. They have it is true other purposes as well. But for this end they are suited, as we shall shew later, above all other means. Here then they cease to be an element of discord and fit harmoniously into the total scheme of things. And it is when they are thus viewed in their twofold relation to the physical and moral order, and in their function as the instrument of revelation, that we attain at last to the true idea of a miracle.

In considering then the course of the world as guided by Divine Providence, we have to consider a twofold series of events: those which take place in accordance with God's ordinary disposition of things and those which involve extraordinary intervention. The latter class, are in the nature of the case, very rare. They would not fulfil their end were they not so. For they are designed by their exceptional character to arouse feelings of wonder and compel men to recognize the immediate working of God. It is doubtless true that there have been some periods when miracles have been more frequent than at others. There have been persons to whom special powers of this kind have been given. There have been places distinguished by

<sup>1</sup> *Notes on the Miracles.* Preliminary Essay, ch. ii.

the number of miraculous favours granted at them. But even when miracles were most frequent they still remained events of the extremest rarity in comparison with the normal working of natural laws. Yet they form, as has been said, an integral part of the whole plan of Providence. Nothing could be more misleading than to speak of them as is done by a well-known rationalist writer<sup>1</sup> as being intended, "for the correction of supposed original errors of design."

Before concluding this chapter it seems desirable to call attention to a novel view of miracles which has recently been defended by certain non-Catholic writers. According to this account a miracle does not involve any suspension of natural law, and the traditional definitions of miracle, such *e.g.*, as that given in Murray's Dictionary, are misleading. A miracle is merely an event in which we recognize a special intention on the part of Providence to direct our attention to some religious truth. "A miracle," says Mr. Rawlinson in *Foundations*, "in any sense in which the term is defensible, does not mean, as we are too often apt to suppose that it means, a sudden and unexpected jerk, as it were, of the Almighty hand that controls the machinery of the Universe. The best definition of a miracle is that it is something which when we are confronted by it, compels us to say: This is the Lord's doing, and it is marvellous in our eyes: it is no less marvellous, if after our first sense

<sup>1</sup> Mr. W. K. Cassels. Voltaire would seem to have been the first to give this description of a miracle in his *Dictionnaire Philosophique*, art. "Miracles." It is, of course, a mere controversial device.

of wonder has calmed down, we are enabled to see a little further into the divinely ordered process by which the event was brought about." It must not be imagined that here we are concerned with a matter of definitions. The question at issue is really as to the possibility of miracles at all. These writers hold that miracles in the traditional sense are a fiction: that they cannot take place. In other words they regard supernatural intervention in the physical order as impossible. In a dispute of vital moment between the old beliefs of Christianity and recent philosophy, they have taken definite sides with the latter. Under these circumstances the more satisfactory course would surely be to declare their position frankly. To give the word "miracle" a new and hitherto unheard-of meaning, and with this proviso to profess acceptance of the miraculous, is a method open to the gravest objections. We do not for a moment suspect those who have done this of want of candour. Men often are unwilling to own to themselves the reality of their change of standpoint; and this leads them to cling to the word after they have given up the thing. But the fact remains that when new opinions are put forward under the cover of the old terms, incautious readers may easily be led to surrender positions of far-reaching consequence without realizing what they are doing.

## CHAPTER II.

### THE POSSIBILITY OF MIRACLES.

**Alleged Impossibility of Miracles—Argument for their Possibility from the Idea of a Supreme Cause—Objections Based on Divine Attributes—Objections Based on Physical Science.**

IT is often said by those who reject miracles that whatever was the case thirty years ago, nowadays no one denies the possibility of miracles in the abstract. The whole question, we are told, is as to whether any valid proof can be offered for the occurrence of a real miracle. Thus Mr. Thompson says: "Theoretically science does not deny the possibility of miracles, because it does not deny the possibility of anything."<sup>1</sup> And words to the same effect might be quoted from other opponents of the miraculous. These protestations have no other meaning than that those who make them do not find it convenient to argue the question of possibility. But in point of fact the impossibility of miracles is as much an assumption with these writers as with those of the past generation. Their acceptance or rejection of evidence is determined by this presupposition. In the very next sentence to that which we have cited, Mr. Thompson tells us: "to admit a miracle is to commit intellectual suicide." So too Harnack writes: "We are firmly convinced that what happens in space and time is subject to the laws of matter

<sup>1</sup> *Miracles of the N.T.*, p. 6.

and motion, and that in this sense, as an interruption of the order of nature there can be no such thing as miracles."<sup>1</sup> In *Foundations* Mr. Streeter gives it as his opinion that God is not free to transcend the limits imposed by natural laws. "It would seem," he says, "as though . . . [God's] freedom operates by combining, arranging and directing, rather than in adding to or subtracting from the system of forces which make up the working of nature."<sup>2</sup>

In the present chapter we propose to shew how slender are the grounds advanced for this position.

The positive argument for the possibility of miracles has to some extent been already set forth. When the true notion of a miracle is clearly grasped, it is seen that there is nothing repugnant or unreasonable in such an act on the part of God. The very idea of a Creator supposes the power peculiar to Himself of determining natural objects to modes of action which no other being can educe from them. And the existence of the twofold order, physical and moral, involves that there may be reasons why from time to time the physical order, however perfect in itself when viewed as a self-contained system, should yield to the exigences of the moral order. These considerations alone appear to shew the possibility of the miraculous, and even to establish a certain antecedent probability for its occurrence. But they may be yet further confirmed by an argument drawn from the relation which the Creator holds to the world as

<sup>1</sup> *What is Christianity?* (London, 1904), p. 27.

<sup>2</sup> *Foundations*, p. 139.

its Supreme Cause. We have already adverted to the fact that the causes operative in the universe are of different orders, the lower being subordinated to the higher. A cause of a higher order can so dispose of those belonging to lower orders as to enable them to produce effects of which, left to themselves, they are altogether incapable. Thus when the inanimate elements enter into the constitution of a living body and come under the control of a vital principle, they operate in ways which were utterly impossible to them in their previous state. Animal life again displays yet higher modes of operation. All the vegetables in the world could never produce a honeycomb. Yet the materials of the honeycomb are drawn from vegetables. With man we find the vast advance which intelligence and free-will confer. Without the presence of man on the globe the existence of a Dreadnought or of an aeroplane would be an impossibility. Their constituent elements existed in the world before the appearance of man. Yet without human causality they could never have been transformed into the finished results we know so well. In relation to lower orders of causes the constructions of human ingenuity are "marvels." Moreover we need not suppose that human agency exhausts the full potentialities of the materials at its disposal. There is nothing unreasonable in the belief held by many besides Christians, that there exist around us incorporeal beings more highly endowed than man, and capable under certain circumstances of acting on the material world. Granted that there are such, it

will follow that these can produce effects altogether beyond the compass of human ability. (The phenomena of spiritualism certainly lend colour to this belief). But however this may be, the existence within our own experience of this ascending scale of causes, and the manifest fact that each successive order in the scale is productive of effects which in regard of the lower orders would have been impossible, leads naturally to the conclusion that the Supreme Cause likewise can and does intervene to do what none but Himself can effect. Unless we have the most solid grounds for the contrary opinion, it would be in the highest degree arbitrary to say that what is possible in the case of all other causes, is impossible in the case of the Highest Cause. Where He intervenes the works will be miracles in the strict sense. For the natural potentialities of things have relation to the various natural causes, whether necessitated or free. When God formed the world, He endowed the different orders of being with potentialities corresponding to the activities of the different orders of causes. A finite cause presupposes a natural potentiality as the necessary condition of its operation. But an infinite cause operates independently of any potentiality.

We may illustrate our meaning by an example. It is in virtue of his free-will that man interferes with the course of nature by damming a river. The great dam of Assouan is a piece of human handiwork which has materially altered the conditions in which nature had placed the valley of the Nile. The regulation of the flow of water ensures



the prosperity of an immense extent of country. Now let us suppose the problem to concern the flow not of water but of molten lava. We may assume for purposes of argument that this is a matter beyond the power of any but the Creator Himself. Let us imagine the eruption of a volcano to be imminent; and further that the neighbouring population are praying earnestly for deliverance from this scourge. It is difficult to see why the Supreme Cause should not intervene to alter the course of events, and exercise in order to do so the causality which is proper to Himself. This causality, as we have pointed out, is that of miracle. Doubtless He could achieve the same result without a miracle, by the providential direction of natural forces. But there seems no reason why we should suppose that when He created the world He pledged Himself that no immediate action of the Supreme Cause should ever take place.

It has often been pointed out that there is a close analogy between acts of human free-will and divine miracles. In both a causality of a new order appears upon the scene, and effects a complete change in the uniform course of nature. But the analogy is frequently misunderstood, and is supposed to imply that God in working a miracle works simply as would a man of vast knowledge and vast power. God, in other words, is conceived as a cause of the same order as man, though operating on a grander scale. To conceive His action in this fashion is to forget that causality of a higher order produces effects differing, not in degree but in kind, from that of a lower order; and to forget

moreover that the distinctive causality exercised by an agent of infinite power is that which we denote by the term "miracle."

It is because they viewed miracles in this light that the scholastic theologians declare that there is a sense in which miracles may be said to be merely "outside" the ordinary course of nature (*praeter naturam*), not "contrary" to nature (*contra naturam*). The relation of nature to God as its First Cause involves as its consequence that an intervention on His part can never be reckoned as a dislocation in the scheme of things—a violation of nature's order. It would be as absurd to call a miracle a violation of nature's order as to call some new and unexpected directions given by a general to the troops under his command a violation of the army's order. The due order of the army is what the general prescribes and nothing else.<sup>1</sup>

On what grounds then is the possibility of miracles denied?

The objections urged are based either on an opposition thought to exist between miracles and the Divine attributes, or on an alleged incompatibility of miracles with physical science. We shall

<sup>1</sup> St. Augustine in more than one passage insists on the same point (*De Civit. Dei*, xxi. 8. 2; *Con. Faust. Man.*, xxvi. 3). It is absurd, he says, to call any disposition of God "contrary" to nature. Nature is what God ordains: hence it is better to say of a miracle that it is "contrary to what is known of nature." His meaning has been strangely misunderstood. Dr. Sanday has actually represented him as meaning that all miracles take place through the operation of unknown natural forces (*Life of Christ in Recent Research*, ch. 8). This extraordinary blunder—it is impossible to call it by any other term—has gained currency through Dr. Sanday's authority and is now often quoted by Anglican writers.

consider in the first place those which are derived from difficulties connected with the divine attributes.

One of the objections most frequently urged is that exceptions to law are incompatible with the wisdom of God. Prof. Mahaffy expresses himself to this effect as follows:

"If the Deity be recognized as a constitutional monarch who in His wisdom has laid down the best laws for the world to obey, the notion of caprice or special legislation or exceptions for any particular reasons, becomes more and more inconsistent with the perfection of this wisdom. Hence even among the most religious people, the importance of miracles as a proof of the divine power, or of special interpositions to please particular people, cannot but wane and pass into the background, as being suited to a ruder and less developed people, and not perfectly consistent with the establishment of wise laws by an omniscient power. The appeal to miracles becomes less and less frequent, and they no longer play a prominent part in the spiritual life even of those who faithfully receive the truth of the Gospel."<sup>1</sup>

It can scarcely escape even the casual reader that whatever apparent force the argument may have, is entirely derived from Dr. Mahaffy's failure to distinguish between the physical and moral orders. Doubtless the laws of nature are the best laws possible with a view to God's physical government of the world. But it does not follow that for His moral government, that is for the guidance of

<sup>1</sup> *Hibbert Journal*, April, 1903.

souls to their eternal destiny, no better plan can be followed than to allow the laws of nature to pursue their course unchecked. Were the physical system so perfectly adapted to the moral end there would be no need for revelation, no need that God should ever direct the course of His Providence in answer to prayer. The whole argument falls to the ground as soon as this confusion is perceived. And even apart from this, what could be more misleading than the comparison between a miracle on the one hand and a dispensation from some wise law capriciously granted by a despot on the other? No one will deny that exceptions and dispensations are desirable in those rare cases where the ruler has sufficient knowledge of all the circumstances to enable him to say that in this case the result will be beneficial. They are only undesirable because, so far as temporal rulers are concerned, they are too frequently granted out of personal caprice and to the detriment of the common good. Such is not the Christian idea of a miracle.

An objection raised by the well-known French Protestant writer M. Paul Sabatier, is even more remarkable. He declares in round terms that his rejection of miracles is "grounded entirely on religious motives." "Miracles," he tells us, "are immoral. The equality of all men before God is a postulate of the religious conscience."<sup>1</sup> Surely it is evident enough that neither spiritual nor temporal advantages are distributed to men in equal proportion. [To some is given much, to others much less.] A child of drunken parents brought

<sup>1</sup> *Vie de S. François d'Assise*, p. 401.

up in a slum scarcely starts with the same religious and moral advantages as, shall we say, the child of pious peasants in the Tyrol. But every gift from God carries its responsibility. A man will be judged according to what he hath, not according to what he hath not. Miracles, like all God's favours, fall under this law. The man on whose behalf a special miracle has been worked, has received more from God than others, and will have to abide a stricter judgment.

A far more specious difficulty than either of the two we have just mentioned, is the alleged incompatibility of miracles with physical science. Some two or three decades ago no objection was urged more frequently or with greater confidence than this. It was widely popularized by writers such as Huxley and Tyndall. And there can be no doubt that it still exercises great influence. We are still constantly told that to admit miracles would subvert all scientific reasoning.<sup>1</sup> The objection may be briefly expressed as follows: The foundation of all science is our belief in the uniformity of nature—the principle which affirms that the same cause will, under the same circumstances, always be followed by the same effect. Physical science consists in a knowledge of the operation of physical causes, which is valid *for the future*; and it is on the principle of uniformity that our certainty regarding the future must depend. A miracle is nothing else than the denial of that principle. Grant the possibility of a miracle, and the necessary basis of science is destroyed. Science,

<sup>1</sup> *E.g., Contentio Veritatis*, p. 53. *Foundations*, p. 138.

in fact, no longer exists, for any prediction may be falsified. But physical science is a reality not to be gainsaid. To it is due the vast series of discoveries which characterize the present age. A man must either close his eyes to the results of a whole era, or he must own the impossibility of miracles, and admit that they must be reckoned as one of the superstitions of an unscientific age.

It may be noticed that some of those who urged this objection, declared it to be fatal, not merely to belief in miracles, but to belief in the efficacy of prayer. Thus Tyndall wrote: "Those who believe that the miraculous is still active in nature, may, with perfect consistency join in our periodic prayers for fair weather and for rain; while those who hold that the age of miracles is past will refuse. . . Assuming the efficacy of free prayer to produce changes in external nature, it necessarily follows that natural laws are more or less at the mercy of man's volition, and no conclusion founded on the assumed permanence of these laws would be worthy of confidence."<sup>1</sup>

The force of the objection is apparent, not real. It is based on a false definition of science and on an erroneous view as to the principle of uniformity. Science remains unimpaired, even though we recognize that a particular prediction as to the future may be miraculously impeded. Nor is the certainty of the principle of uniformity, if that principle be rightly understood, in any way shaken by the admission that miracles occur.

If we ask what is the essential distinction be-

<sup>1</sup> *Fragments of Science* (London, 1871), p. 36.

tween science and the knowledge of particular facts, the answer alike of common-sense and of the best minds 'both in ancient and modern times is the same. Knowledge to be scientific must be *generalized* knowledge. H. Sidgwick has well said: "To get a definition of science . . . we must, I think, take the characteristic of 'generality' as the essential distinction between scientific knowledge and merely 'historical' knowledge of particular facts. . . . It is true that we largely regard knowledge of particular facts, *e.g.*, of the discovery of a new planet; as scientific knowledge, but only, I think, in view of its relation to general knowledge."<sup>1</sup> Our minds have the power not merely of knowing the particular events which fall under our senses but of abstracting general notions which express those permanent types and stable relations which we call laws of nature. If we consult a scientific work on chemistry, it gives us information regarding carbon, hydrogen, &c., in general. It is not concerned with this or that particular morsel of carbon, but with the properties of carbon as such. So too in works, say, on medicine. If they speak of individual cases of a particular disease, it is in order to convey knowledge as to this disease in general. The question as to how we pass from the experience of particulars to the general notion is a question of logic which does not concern us here. The process is termed Induction. It is sufficient to note that the result of the inductive process is to give us the abstract knowledge of the type and its properties.

<sup>1</sup> *Philosophy, its Scope and Relations*, p. 8.

Now even if in an individual case God should work a miracle, our scientific knowledge is as true as it was before. Our knowledge of the type would be genuine knowledge, though in this instance the individual object receives new powers. God may make an iron axe-head to float; yet it is none the less true that iron as such is heavier than water. He may cause the fetters to fall from Peter's hands; yet this does not invalidate the scientific truth that iron as such is rigid. It is of course the case that in virtue of our scientific knowledge of the type, we predict how the individual instances of the type will act. But science does not consist in the power to predict. It consists in the generalized knowledge regarding the type and regarding those relations of the type to other objects which we call laws of nature. Prediction, it is true, is a consequence of science. But science is unshaken even though our prediction that an individual axe-head is irrecoverably lost, should prove mistaken.

The account we have given as to the true nature of science must have made it evident that there is no ground whatever for asserting that miracles conflict with the principle of uniformity. Indeed this principle is a demonstrable truth. Natural agents exercise a true causality. The connexion between the agent and the result produced is not a mere time-sequence of antecedent and consequent, but a connexion of causal efficiency. The reason why the effect is what it is, is to be found in the properties of the agent. Every characteristic of the effect is derived from them. Now the action of natural agents, since they are devoid of free-will,



is rigidly determined. It follows that in the same circumstances the same agent must always act in the same way: similar causes acting in the same circumstances must necessarily always produce the same effect. But every such exercise of activity presupposes as a condition the concurrence of God. No created cause can operate apart from this. And the principle of uniformity, since it is concerned solely with these second causes, must always be understood with this condition. In the case of a miracle the condition is not verified.

It is instructive to observe that not a few of those who held the admission of the miraculous to be incompatible with science, so explain the principle of uniformity as to undermine science. We could have no better example of this than Huxley himself. It is true that he preferred to reject miracles on the ground that no evidence can ever be adduced capable of establishing the occurrence of a miracle; but he is insistent in asserting that science demands the unhesitating acceptance of the principle that natural law admits of no exception whatever. Yet on what does he base his belief in the principle of uniformity? Not on the solid ground that the nature of the effect is derived from the cause. For he adhered to the doctrine of the empirical school that our knowledge is limited to the co-existences and sequences of phenomena; and that we have no right to affirm that the antecedent makes the consequent to be what it is. But if this be so, no proof of the principle of uniformity can possibly be forthcoming. This he frankly owned. "If there is

anything in the world which I firmly believe," he avers, "it is the universal validity of the law of causation, but that universality cannot be proved by any amount of experience."<sup>1</sup> In another place he terms the belief in the universal validity of the principle of uniformity, "the one act of faith demanded of the convert to science." By faith he intends us here to understand a blind opinion for which no adequate ground can be assigned. A philosophy which can give no more satisfactory an account of the uniformity of nature than this, is planting the foundations of science on the sand.

Mr. Thompson is in no better case. He tells us that the principle of uniformity is "a postulate of scientific method."<sup>2</sup> We need not point out that it bears no resemblance whatever to a postulate in the accepted use of the term, as employed, *e.g.*, in geometry. To call it by this name only signifies that he can offer us no explanation of it, and consequently asks to be allowed to "postulate" it. His metaphysical system, whatever it may be, is bankrupt, though he seeks to conceal the fact behind a phrase.

It is, to say the least, remarkable that those who assert the incompatibility of science with belief in miracles should apparently be oblivious of the fact that the most eminent scientist of the nineteenth century—Louis Pasteur—the man whom Frenchmen generally regard as the greatest genius their

<sup>1</sup> *Essays*, ix. 121. By the "law of causation," Huxley signifies the principle of uniformity.

<sup>2</sup> *Miracles of the N.T.*, p. 5.

country has produced during that period, was a devout Catholic, and as such a believer, not merely in the possibility, but in the historic occurrence of miracles. That great benefactor of his kind declared in words too well known for quotation that thought and research, so far from diminishing his faith in his religion, had strengthened it: that under their influence it had become as undoubting as is that of the Breton peasant. In the face of such testimony as that, we may rest assured that when miracles are rejected, the cause of the rejection is to be sought elsewhere than in scientific knowledge.

## CHAPTER III.

### THE PROOF OF A MIRACLE.

Objection Drawn from Unknown Natural Causes—  
Huxley's Contention that whatever Exists is part of  
Nature—the Demand for the Testimony of Specialists  
—Alleged Impossibility of Historical Proof of a Super-  
natural Event.

ALTHOUGH in every attack on miracles, it is their possibility that is really in question, in recent years, as we have already noticed, their opponents have usually preferred to take a different ground. It is impossible, they tell us, to prove that a miracle has ever taken place. The assertion is a startling one. Doubtless, because of their strangeness, miracles demand a fuller investigation than other facts and testimony of a specially reliable kind. But granted a sufficiency of testimony to an event such as a rising from the dead, and it would seem that proof of a miracle exists. In such a case we are concerned with an historic fact. And testimony is the legitimate medium for past events of whatever kind they may be. On three different grounds, however, it is contended that proof of a miracle is impossible. (1) Some of our opponents assert that it is always the more reasonable course to attribute the alleged miracle to unknown natural causes and not to any divine interference. (2) Others challenge the value of the whole mass of testimony for the occurrence of miracles. As soon as it is examined, they tell us, it proves to be of so inadequate a character, that it cannot command the

confidence of reasonable men. (3) Others, again, urge that a supernatural fact is as such incapable of historical proof. The supernatural, they tell us, belongs not to history but to faith.] Each of these objections calls for consideration.

The objection drawn from the existence of unknown natural laws has long been the favourite weapon of the rationalist armoury. It is to be found in nearly every work written from that standpoint. We are, it is urged, unable to assign any limit to the powers of nature. We cannot say how far they go. Owing to the discoveries of modern science, things once deemed absolutely incredible have become matters of every-day experience. Had a mediæval monk witnessed a conversation through the telephone, or seen an aeroplane weighing many hundredweights rise and take its flight through the air at the rate of nearly a hundred miles an hour, he would have believed himself in presence of a miracle. Yet notwithstanding our advance, we are well aware that we have only begun to unravel nature's secrets. With what justice do we assert that events such, for instance, as those narrated in the Gospels, may not have resulted from the operation of natural laws? The eye-witnesses, it is true, believed that what they saw could only be the direct work of God. We need not blame them because they did not see further than their contemporaries. But the standpoint of the modern mind is very different.

The argument, though at first sight plausible, is manifestly fallacious. In regard indeed to some miracles, more especially some of those concerned

with bodily cures, it may be freely admitted that in the facts themselves there is nothing to exclude the supposition that some unknown law might have produced them. A pious mother hangs a relic of some saint about her dying child's neck: and in some way inexplicable to the medical attendants the child recovers. It would be rash to affirm with certainty that the event was the result of divine interference: that nature has no resources unknown to the physicians which might explain the event. But because this is so in some cases, it does not follow that it is so as regards all, and that there are none of which we can affirm with certainty that they are altogether beyond the power of natural causes. It surely is a commonplace of experience that between two classes clearly distinguished the one from the other, there is often a dubious territory which provides many a puzzle to the enquirer. In regard to some of the lower forms of life, even a professed scientist may be pardoned if what he took to be a vegetable turns out to be an animal after all. But no one hesitates as to the class to which he shall assign a cat or a carrot. So too as regards human actions. As to many of them we really cannot say whether they deserve praise or blame. But all are agreed that the garrotter deserves the utmost rigour that the law allows, and that self-sacrifice for the sake of the needy merits praise. These examples suffice to illustrate the point for which we contend. Even if we admit that in regard to miracles there is a doubtful borderland, and that piety has often seen a miracle where none existed, it still remains true

that there are some events, which, if historically established, clearly exclude the supposition of natural causality of any kind. Take, for instance, the feeding of the five thousand related in the Gospels. We are told that five thousand men, together with the women and children accompanying them, were fed on five loaves and two small fishes, and that not merely did all receive a sufficient meal, but that twelve large baskets were filled with the fragments. No one can seriously suggest that there can be any question of natural means here. There is only one alternative: either the event was miraculous or the whole narrative is pure fiction.

No less certain is it that the calling of the dead to life is beyond any natural power. Death consists in the severance of soul from body, and this severance takes place when sickness or injury has rendered the bodily frame no longer capable of retaining the vital principle. For the presence of that principle is dependent on a certain condition of the physical organism, and when the disorder of the organism has reached a certain point, the soul is expelled from the body. In man, we know, it does not perish, for it is spiritual and indestructible. But in order for it to return to the body and reanimate it, it would first be necessary for the body to be repaired to that degree which is requisite for the soul's presence. This, however, is impossible. If there is one law of physiology which is absolutely certain it is that the repair of the organism can only take place through the presence of the vital principle. It is the work of that princi-

ple itself. While there is life, we say, there is hope; for so long as the soul remains in the body, the principle of repair is there. But when the soul is sundered from the body, the possibility of amelioration is absolutely excluded. No one without manifest absurdity can appeal to "an unknown law of nature."

Some have supposed that, where miracles appear as an endowment of a particular personality, the power by which they were worked differed, not in kind, but only in degree from that exerted by ordinary human wills. The miraculous action is not strictly speaking supernatural, but analogous in some way to the usual action of mind on matter. It is a capacity to control nature resulting from the possession of transcendent knowledge and transcendent goodness. Thus a recent writer says in reference to our Lord's miracles: "Such a power may not necessarily differ in kind from the power possessed by ordinary human wills. For that power, too, is in truth miraculous. We can moreover assign no limits to the possibilities of human knowledge or the potentialities of human energy. Nor do we know what addition to human capacity in controlling nature, might be brought by an advance to perfect goodness."<sup>1</sup> This is only the appeal to "unknown laws" in another form. It seems sufficient to say that it is an absolutely gratuitous hypothesis. There is not a shred of evidence that advance in goodness gives a man any

<sup>1</sup> Mr. H. H. Williams in *Miracles* (edited by W. Lock, M.A.) p. 107. The view adopted by Mr. Temple in *Foundations*, p. 259, would appear to be identical.



control over nature. Christ distinctly professed to work His miracles by divine power, not in virtue of human goodness: and the apostles worked miracles not by any force inherent in themselves but in the name of Jesus of Nazareth. Moreover the hypothesis is useless as regards the purpose for which it is put forward. No amount of power to control nature similar in kind to that possessed by human wills could raise the dead or feed five thousand people on five loaves.

Again in regard to many miracles of healing, the instantaneous character of the cure affords us a sure ground for rejecting the hypothesis of unknown natural causes as manifestly false. We may take by way of example some of the cures which have taken place at Lourdes, to which more detailed reference will be made later on. Cases have occurred in which deep-seated ulcers of many months standing have instantaneously disappeared, broken bones have been instantaneously reunited, caries instantaneously healed. There can be no question of natural causes here. In the first place, cures which take place through the operation of natural law are never instantaneous. The myriad cells required to the formation of new flesh or new bone can only be built up gradually. These sudden results are only known to occur under one set of conditions, viz.: when the direct intervention of divine power has been sought. And secondly, were the causes of the cure natural, so sudden and complete a transformation must necessarily suppose the operation of some new cause adequate to the result. But we know for a fact that no such cause

is present. The circumstances surrounding the case are just what they were. The patient has taken no new remedies; he has undergone no new treatment. He has merely applied a little water in hope of a cure through the special intervention of God. Appeal is often made to "faith-healing" as an explanation. But, as we shall shew in the next chapter, faith-healing can have no place in such cases as we have cited. Indeed instances have been known in which the patient was devoid of the least expectation of cure, but simply consented to visit the fountain at the persuasion of relatives.

A word must be said regarding the assertion that a mediæval monk put in presence of some of our modern discoveries such as a telephone or an aeroplane would have believed himself face to face with the miraculous. It may reasonably, we think, be doubted whether he would have believed anything of the kind. It is to be remembered in regard to these inventions that they one and all require a mechanical apparatus. The application of natural laws postulates something of the kind. Now doubtless in the middle ages there were monks and monks, some sharp, others slow-witted. But we decline to credit that even those who were duller than the ordinary run of their fellows, when they saw the elaborate mechanism and heard the buzz of the machine, would have believed themselves in presence of a miracle. When God works miracles, He does not use machines.!

Huxley has propounded an objection somewhat resembling the one we have been considering. It

calls for mention as it is still apparently regarded by some writers as a valid objection against the traditional view of miracles.<sup>1</sup> It is to the effect that the laws of nature as we know them never pretend to real certainty. All that the scientist professes to do is to collect facts, and then enunciate a general statement summing them up, to which he gives the name of "law." But the word is really a misnomer. We have no ground for attributing any certainty to these "laws," or for supposing that contrary facts will not occur. In that case we shall know that our so-called law was a mistake on our part. But these facts are no less natural than any others.

"Nature," he writes, "(to the man of science) means neither more nor less than that which is: the sum of the phenomena presented to our experience, the totality of events, past, present and to come. Every event must be taken to be part of nature, until proof to the contrary is supplied. And such proof from the nature of the case is impossible. . . . If a dead man did come to life, the fact would be evidence, not that any law of nature had been violated, but that these laws, even when they express the result of very long and uniform experience, are necessarily based on incomplete knowledge, and are to be held only as grounds of more or less reasonable expectation" (*Hume*, p. 133).

Mr. Mallock in a remarkable essay has called attention to the strange confusions into which Huxley was sometimes betrayed when engaged in

<sup>1</sup> See *Cambridge Theological Essays*, p. 312.

religious controversy. His words are worth citing in this connection:

"Professor Huxley is a very remarkable man. On those subjects by his mastery of which he has grown so famous, he is admired and listened to by all who can form an opinion about them . . . . But when he quits the physical world for the moral, a strange change comes over him, and all that his strength can do is to recoil upon itself. . . . The vigour of his intellect does not desert him. Even here he is above his fellows. He masses together contradictory and incompatible statements as no one else does. His inconsistencies are more trenchant and come on us with the force of a sledge hammer."<sup>1</sup> The passage just cited is surely a case in point. To score a dialectical advantage over the believers in the supernatural, he jettisons the whole of that physical science of which he was so distinguished an exponent. For physical science consists in the certain knowledge of those laws which hold good in the natural order. Certainty and universality are its essential characteristics. What is merely probable is not yet scientific knowledge properly so-called. It is true that on many points science has as yet only probabilities and hypotheses to offer us. But if we attach value to these it is because we hope that some day we may discover the truth. Could we never attain certainty regarding any natural law, science would be impossible. It would be a hunt for the non-existent, and wise men would spend their time on more profitable pursuits

<sup>1</sup> "Faith and Verification," *Nineteenth Century*, 1878, July-Dec., p. 686.

than in searching for what is not. Of course Huxley had no more doubt than any other man that as regards a vast number of scientific truths, he possessed real and irreversible certainty.

Now in the passage cited he deliberately commits himself to the view that all certainty is impossible. To score a victory over his antagonists he makes profession of pure scepticism and proclaims the futility of all science.

On the other hand, the position of those who are prepared to admit the miraculous is free from all difficulty. They believe in the power of the human intellect to attain valid knowledge regarding nature's laws. In other words they believe in science. And they hold further that if a fact should occur which is in flat contradiction with some law as to the validity of which there is no doubt, the intellect can recognize that the fact lies outside nature's system. It is incommensurable with it and supposes a reversal of nature's order. Hence when we learn on satisfactory authority that on a given occasion a man's iron fetters fell from his hands, or that some saint was seen to be raised from the ground in a state of ecstatic prayer, we do not feel that our scientific outlook needs readjustment. The fact does not militate against the natural rigidity of iron nor against the truth of the law of gravity.

It is hardly necessary to call attention to the ingenious sophistry involved in the statement that "nature is neither more nor less than that which is." When we say that a miracle is against nature, we signify that it is contrary to the normal pro-

cesses of nature, to the fixed laws of the natural. The whole point under discussion is whether there are not certain facts which fall outside these processes. To start with the assertion that nature is "the totality of events, past, present and to come" is to beg the whole question—a *petitio principii* of the most audacious kind.

Of course physical science as such cannot tell us whence the new fact comes. For the province of physical science is simply to discover those fixed equations which hold good between natural phenomena; and if it goes beyond this it is travelling outside its province. But above and beyond the special physical sciences lies that wider science which treats of First and Second Causes, the science we know by the name of metaphysics, which is nothing else than human reason applied, not to some special aspect of reality, but to the universe as a whole. When physical science assures us regarding some fact that it does not belong to nature's system, then it is for metaphysics to step in and assure us that it is the effect of some higher causal agency, and in certain cases to affirm unhesitatingly that it can only proceed from the First Cause Himself. And here, be it noted, we are not speaking of the metaphysics of the schools. Just as every man is a mathematician so far as to know that two and two make four, and a scientist to the extent of understanding that fire burns, so, too, the first elements of philosophical thought are native to us all. When nature's laws are manifestly reversed, as *e.g.*, in the feeding of the five thousand, there is no one who cannot recognize that this is the work of the

First Cause, that we are face to face with a miracle.

(2) Among the reasons given for denying that the occurrence of any miracle can be regarded as proved, we mentioned in the second place the alleged insufficiency of the testimony for miracles. It is urged that no evidence worth considering is forthcoming; that such evidence as there is comes invariably from men wholly incapable of forming a judgment on such a matter. And it is implied that such will also be the character of any evidence which may be produced in future. This is the line adopted by Renan in his *Life of Christ*, and by M. Sabatier in his *Esquisse d'une Philosophie de la Religion*. Charcot, the founder of the Paris School of Hypnotic Therapeutics, states the objection as follows:

"Events presenting the appearance of the marvellous require to be established by a far more rigorous procedure than ordinary occurrences. Only specialists are capable of judicious observation in such cases. Even ordinary doctors may be misled and may make a false diagnosis of them. Much more than may this be so in a witness devoid of any scientific knowledge and prejudiced by education and environment in favour of the supernatural, hoping for it, expecting it."

Now we may readily grant that mistakes may occasionally arise from this cause. Were it not so there would not be a special office at Lourdes (*bureau de constatation*) to ensure this accuracy of observation. At that sanctuary no recovery is accounted miraculous, unless the case has been most carefully examined both before and after the

alleged cure by a committee of doctors. [In all probability during the ages of faith many a recovery was attributed to direct divine intervention which in fact took place by natural processes.] But granting all this, we deny that an expert is always necessary. There are miracles in which the testimony of the plain man is amply sufficient to inform us as to the facts, even though he is not highly educated: and his information is able to render it clear that the event did not take place by natural causes. If, for instance, a man known to numbers of people as lame from his birth is at the invocation of the name of Jesus, suddenly and completely cured, so that, although he has never walked before, he forthwith enters the Temple "walking and leaping and praising God" (Acts iii. 8) the facts are within the competence of all men, and not of surgeons only. So too if, as occurred in the well-known case of Pierre de Rudder at Oostacker in 1875, a man with a suppurating wound in his leg from which the broken end of his shin-bone protruded, suddenly throws down his crutch and is found to be absolutely and entirely healed,<sup>1</sup> the scientific specialist can be dispensed with. Where we are concerned with plain facts falling under the senses—and many miracles are of this character—the testimony of two or three average men is every whit as good as that of two or three professors. This is the universal sense of mankind. When a traveller returns from some hitherto unexplored country and brings unexpected news as

<sup>1</sup> The case of P. de Rudder is discussed in detail in ch. vii.



to the flora and fauna of the place, provided that he is known to be honest and that the facts are such as he was fully competent to observe, we do not dream of rejecting his opinion on the ground that he did not graduate in botany or in zoology. And similarly to refuse the testimony of honest and capable men to a miraculous occurrence, and to insist that none but specialists are admissible as witnesses, is, if the facts in question were such as to fall within the scope of ordinary sense-perception, devoid of all justification.

As we have already said, this objection is not the real ground why those who urge it reject the miraculous. It is a mere afterthought. They hold miracles to be impossible; but conscious of the difficulty involved in proving their impossibility, they prefer to adopt another mode of argument. This appears plainly in Renan. In the *Vie de Jésus*, (p. xcvi.) he states definitely: "We do not say, 'miracles are impossible'; we say 'no miracle has ever yet been proved to have occurred.'" But in his *Marc Aurèle* his true standpoint shews itself. There he tells us: "Yet another cause has in our days done much to undermine the religion which our forefathers regarded so contentedly. The denial of the supernatural has become an indisputable dogma for every cultivated mind. The history alike of the physical and the moral world appears to us as a development whose causes are internal and altogether exclude the miraculous, that is the intervention of conscious agents acting with deliberate purpose." (p. 637). The reasons for rejection given in these two works are funda-

mentally different. It is easy to see which is the genuine one.

(3) It remains in conclusion to consider the objection based on the ground that historical evidence cannot reach supernatural events, but only what is natural; and that therefore since a miracle is supernatural, it is altogether irrational to try and prove it historically. If we believe in miracles, we are told, we must believe in them as a consequence of our faith: they can never be its basis. This is the position adopted by Harnack in his *History of Dogma* (vol. i. p. 65, n.). "The historian," he says, "cannot regard a miracle as a sure given historical event, for in doing so, he destroys the mode of consideration on which all historical investigation rests. Every individual miracle remains historically quite doubtful"; and he adds that the conclusion that Christ worked miracles, "belongs to the province of religious faith." So, too, the Modernists adopted the same argument in order to deny the possibility of proving the miracles and Resurrection of our Lord. These, they asserted, are one and all supernatural, and as such they evade the grasp of historical criticism.<sup>1</sup> But the argument is after all a mere sophism resting on an ambiguity in our use of the word supernatural. By "supernatural truths" we sometimes signify the truths which we know by revelation alone, which we are totally incapable of learning by direct observation. In this sense it is quite true that what is supernatural falls outside the scope of history,

<sup>1</sup> *Programme of Modernism*, p. 133; cf. Loisy, *Autour d'un Petit Livre*, p. 169; Wendland, *Miracles and Christianity*, pp. 236-238.

- and that supernatural truths cannot be established by historical evidence. But in this sense a miracle is not a supernatural truth, it is an occurrence which falls under our senses, and which not revelation but reason proclaims to be due to a direct intervention of the First Cause. In its other meaning, "supernatural" denotes what is contrary to the normal order of causes and effects which God has established in the universe. In this sense a miracle is supernatural. But the supernatural thus understood falls as much within the province of the historian as any other occurrence which men have witnessed, and which has influenced the course of human affairs. Moreover it is for him to note its miraculous character, and to point out that here the supreme providence of God intervened in a special manner. For it is the business of the historian not merely to be a chronicler of material happenings, but to attribute events to their causes.

## CHAPTER IV.

### MIRACLES AND FAITH-HEALING.

Faith-healing Alleged as the Cause of Miraculous Cures—Charcot's Views as to Hysterical Maladies—Recent Change in Medical Opinion—Faith-healing in Pre-Christian Times.

IN this chapter we are concerned with a special class of miracles—those of healing. Not a few of those who adopt a thoroughly rationalist standpoint, nevertheless recognize the cogency of the evidence for many of the occurrences usually classed as miracles. They believe however that it is possible to make a distinction between the works of healing on one side, and those miracles which suppose a direct command over external nature on the other. The latter class, they hold, should be dismissed as legendary. But the case of works of healing is different. Their occurrence is indisputable. To refuse to admit them would be to make the acceptance and rejection of evidence purely arbitrary. But miracles they were not. They were certainly due to the effects of suggestion, and analogous effects can be and are produced to-day by the medical profession. Indeed the practice of faith-healing, it is urged, was familiar even in pre-Christian days to the Greeks. The accounts of the "wonder-cures" contained in the Gospels and in some of the lives of the saints, are in the main true; but orthodox Christianity has blundered in reckoning them as supernatural.

This view as to the miraculous enjoys a widespread popularity at the present day. It is believed to provide a sufficient explanation not merely of the Gospel miracles, but of the events which are occurring at the present day at Lourdes. Thus in a recent rationalist work entitled *The Search after Truth*<sup>1</sup> we read: "There seems to be little doubt that Jesus performed miracles by what we now call faith-healing." And Mr. J. M. Thompson in *Miracles of the New Testament* says of the miraculous cures narrated in St. Mark's Gospel: "There is probably not one [of these cures] which either is not explicable, or if we knew the original facts would not be explicable, as an instance of faith-healing" (p. 40). And he explicitly refers to this agency the cures of the deaf man with an impediment in his speech (vii. 32), of the blind man (viii. 22), of the paralytic (ii. 3), of the man with the withered hand (iii. 1), of the blind man (x. 46), and the exorcism of deaf and dumb spirits (ix. 14). To it he likewise attributes the cures at Lourdes: "Holy wells, reliquaries and the tombs of saints," he writes, "have in every uneducated part or period of Christendom provided the necessary stimulus to faith, and produced cures analogous to those of the Gospel. In modern times the official records of Lourdes, even after all allowances have been made for lack of evidence, are sufficiently remarkable." Somewhat similarly M. Paul Sabatier, when dealing with the question of the stigmata of St. Francis, declar   himself wholly

<sup>1</sup> *The Search after Truth*, by Philalethes (London, 1903), p. 209.

unable to resist the weight of contemporary testimony to the effect that the marks of the Sacred Passion did indeed appear upon the saint's body. The astonishing fact, he admits, actually occurred. The heads of the nails appeared on the palms of Francis's hands, their long points were visible on the back; the same strange phenomenon was seen on his feet, and his side was opened as with a spear-wound. But miracles do not happen. We must look, he holds, for the explanation in "mental pathology." And so, too, M. Bernheim, the chief of the medical school of Nancy, in his *Traité de la Suggestion et de ses Applications à la Thérapeutiques*, writes regarding the cures at Lourdes: "These cases were observed with perfect fairness and duly tested by men of honour. The facts took place as stated; it is the interpretation put upon them that is erroneous."<sup>1</sup>

In view of so prevalent an opinion, it will be well to consider with some care what suggestion is capable of effecting, and where its power stops. Only thus can we test the adequacy of the explanation offered.

The theory undoubtedly owes its popularity to Charcot. That famous physician held that every so-called miraculous cure could be traced to the presence of hysteria in the subject. Hysteria, he taught, was an ailment not of the nervous system only but of the whole organism, and possessed the strange peculiarity that it could mimic almost every disease. It could, above all, produce what in medical terminology are known as trophic lesions, viz.:

<sup>1</sup> Pt. ii. c. 1. p. 296 (3rd ed., Paris, 1891).

those lesions which are apt to arise in any part of the body if the connexion between it and the nerve centres has been severed, and it is thus deprived of all supply of nerve energy. Ulceration, gangrene, oedema, may all be of this character. And hysteria, in his opinion, was thus often responsible for the presence of these troubles. But hysteria is readily affected by suggestion: suggestion can lead it to alter the character of its manifestations and suggestion can cure it. Here then, urged Charcot, we have the explanation of "wonder-cures." They take place by faith-healing. The personality of the healer dominates the patient whose illness, whatever its apparent character, is really hysterical in nature. His command, "Arise and walk," provides the suggestion requisite. The cure of organic lesions follows naturally on the removal of the radical malady. Miracles effected in pilgrimages are to be referred to auto-suggestion.

The authority of Charcot ranked so high that his views won an immediate and wide, though not universal, acceptance. Many of the most eminent members of the profession held with him that in a hysterical patient, local hemorrhage, vesication, even ulceration, could be produced by suggestion. Many remarkable experiments of this character were reported to the medical press. Thus Drs. Bourru and Burot of La Rochelle instanced the case of a young man in the hospital of that city, a hysterical patient, who was bidden to bleed at a given spot on his arm, at a certain hour in the coming afternoon, and they affirmed that at the hour appointed there

was in fact an exudation of blood at the spot.<sup>1</sup> Such facts were quickly employed as affording a ready explanation of the stigmatization related of St. Francis, and of some others among the saints. In 1900, when M. Crocq took the opinion of a number of nerve doctors as to the possibility of producing organic disorders by suggestion, all but three declared that in their opinion it could be done. He himself remained unconvinced. For in the case of those members of the profession who claimed to have personally verified the possibility by actual experiments, he doubted whether sufficient precautions had been taken to exclude the risk of simulation on the part of the patient.<sup>2</sup>

Within the last decade, however, there has been a very complete change of medical opinion on the subject. This has been principally due to the investigations of J. J. F. Babinski, one of the most eminent authorities on these matters. According to him hysteria is not a physical but a psychical malady. It is an abnormal mental condition, and consists in an extreme readiness to accept suggestion whether in the direction of sickness or of recovery. In the case of certain functional derangements the imagination of the patient, stimulated by the suggestion, suffices to cause the trouble in question. But where the evil is of an organic character another explanation must be sought. In these cases the hysterical subject, become the prey of a fixed idea, has resorted to deliberate imposture, and

<sup>1</sup> De Bonniot, *Le Miracle et ses Contrefaçons* (5th ed., 1895), pp. 298-302.

<sup>2</sup> Vourch, *La Foi qui Guérit* (Bordeaux, 1911), p. 62.



has himself produced the ailment on which his mind is set. Charcot, Babinski declared, was in error when he spoke of hysteria as the mimic of all diseases. It is not hysteria but the hysterical patient that mimics them—sometimes consciously, sometimes unconsciously. Hysteria is totally incapable of causing trophic lesions. Those lesions which physicians had thought to have this source, were one and all obtained by artificial means.

Babinski's conclusions were made the subject of formal discussion by the *Société de Neurologie* of Paris in 1908. The members, in view of the importance of the question, had ample notice, and had each revised the whole question of hysteria within his own special department. The result was overwhelmingly in favour of Babinski. Charcot's theories, it was admitted, must be definitely abandoned. Doctors were now more fully on their guard than hitherto, and careful observation from many quarters confirmed the conclusions arrived at by the *Société de Neurologie*. It was again and again discovered that patients who were believed to be suffering from some serious affection of hysterical origin, were in fact themselves engaged in producing the ailment for which they were asking a cure. Apparently there is no length to which this passion for simulation will not go. In the *Presse Médicale* (10 June, 1908), a case is related of a patient on whose arm gangrenous sores were constantly breaking out. The trouble proved refractory to all remedial measures, and as a last resort the arm was amputated. A few days later the same ailment appeared on one of his legs. It

was not till then that the doctors realized that the sores were artificially produced, and that the patient was a victim to the hysterical passion for simulating illness. This morbid, but apparently irresistible craving, had led him to make an entirely purposeless sacrifice of an arm, and he would, had he not been discovered, have sacrificed a leg in a similar way.<sup>1</sup>

So complete has been the change of opinion on the subject, that Dr. Vourch assures us that the French medical press at the present day declines to insert cases in which ulcers, gangrene, pemphigus, vesication, etc., are attributed to hysteria. There is practical unanimity among doctors that hysteria is incapable of producing organic lesions, and it is looked on as certain that if only sufficient precautions be taken, the ailment in every case will be traced to the patient himself.

It may safely be said that virtually the whole medical profession is agreed that there is not a jot of positive evidence that suggestion, whether hypnotic or otherwise, can do anything to remedy an organic lesion: that, on the contrary, all the evidence hitherto produced goes to show that its curative effects are strictly limited to functional derangements.<sup>2</sup> The majority of neurologists hold

<sup>1</sup> Vourch, *op. cit.*, p. 50.

<sup>2</sup> In a paper contributed to *Medicine and the Church* (edited by G. Rhodes, London, 1910), Dr. H. G. G. Mackenzie, M.A., M.B., gives an account of the discussion held by the Harveian Society in October, 1909, as to the results to be obtained by suggestion. Summing up the conclusions arrived at, he says: "Here we have grouped together the expression of the opinions of trained minds of responsible medical men. The differences are compara-

that in only two classes of cases is it of practical service. To the first of these belong cases of actual hysteria. In these it will sometimes be an effective remedy both against the hysterical fit and against the functional troubles which hysteria can produce, such, *e.g.*, as hysterical paralysis. These, as is well known, differ from the real illnesses which correspond to them, in not being due to any pathological condition of the organism. Thus, while true paralysis is the result either of some serious injury or of organic disease affecting the spinal cord or some other part of the motor nerve-system, in hysterical paralysis there is no lesion of any kind. The will can no longer move the body, and apparently that is all that can be said. The second class comprises certain confirmed ill-habits and functional disorders commonly found in those whose nervous system is more or less deranged. Of these the morphia and drink habits may furnish an example. Bernheim and the school of Nancy would somewhat extend the sphere of its operations and believe that it may be effectively employed in certain organic diseases; but even here they limit its use to the relief of functional troubles, which are not directly caused by the organic lesion, but arise through nervous reaction. Asthma is occasionally of this character. Yet even Bernheim makes no exaggerated claims on behalf of suggestion as a remedy. "Suggestion," he tells us, "cannot kill

tively slight. The agreement is remarkable. Not one of them (though in one case as many as four thousand records are in his hands) claims to have cured what are usually called organic conditions" (p. 129).

microbes, it cannot cretify tubercles, nor can it cicatrize a circular ulcer of the stomach. . . . It must be allowed that its results are temporary. It can restore the function provided that the lesion has not definitely destroyed it, and provided that the functional affection is only a dynamic trouble arising outside the field of the lesion. But suggestion cannot stay the organic evolution of the malady. Too often the amelioration it produces is but transient. Those illnesses which of their own nature pursue a progressive course, such as locomotor ataxia or disseminated sclerosis follow out their inexorable advance, and there comes a time when suggestion can do no more."<sup>1</sup>

We have only to call to mind the character of the miracles of healing related in the Gospels, to see that to put forward faith-healing as their sufficient explanation argues a total ignorance of the subject. In the Gospel of St. Mark—we take it first since at the present day it is held by most non-Catholic critics to be the oldest—we find mentioned the healing of fever (i. 29), of leprosy (i. 49), of a withered hand (iii. 1), of paralysis (ii. 4), of an issue of blood of twelve years' duration (v. 22), of blindness (viii. 22; x. 47), of a deaf-mute (vii. 32). The cures contained in St. Matthew fall all of them under one or other of these classes. St. Luke, however, adds the healing of the man with dropsy (xiv. 1), and of the woman who had been bent double for eighteen years (xiii. 10).

<sup>1</sup> Bernheim, *Hypnotisme, Suggestion, Psychothérapie*, pp. 209, 233, cited by Sortais, *La Providence et le Miracle* (Paris, 1905), p. 111.

There is not one of these miracles which can with any show of reason be attributed to faith-healing.<sup>1</sup> The idea that it could be successfully employed against fever, a withered hand, leprosy, an issue of blood or long-standing or against dropsy, is sheer extravagance. The same may be said of blindness. There is, it is true, an affection of the sight called hysterical amblyopia, which might conceivably be cured in this way. But this ailment is extremely rare, and like other forms of hysteria, is chiefly found in women. On the other hand, true blindness is very common in the East, where the copious dust is a source of danger to the eyesight. It would be beyond all probability to suppose that the various blind men whom our Lord cured, were all sufferers from the hysterical form of the malady.

Nor is there much more justification for referring the cure of the paralytic to the effect of suggestion. In a case of true paralysis—a common disease—it would be absolutely powerless. And there is but little likelihood that the man spoken of in the Gospels was the victim of an ailment so uncommon in the male sex as hysterical paralysis.

Moreover this further point must be observed. The Gospel narrative represents the cures effected by our Lord as instantaneous and complete. The result is perfect from the moment the word is spoken. In one or two exceptional cases where the cure was more or less gradual (Mk. vii. 32; viii. 22), the fact is accounted worthy of special

<sup>1</sup> See R. J. Ryle, M.D., "The Neurotic Theory of the Miracles of Healing." *Hibbert Journal*, 1907, p. 572.

mention. Ordinarily the blind see, the cripples walk, the lepers are cleansed on the instant; and it is implied that there was no relapse. In faith-healing this is not so. The process is usually slow, needing immense patience on the part of the operator, and there is great probability of relapse. In this as well as in the character of the diseases treated there is absolutely no parallelism between the two cases.

It may be safely said that either the Gospel cures were miraculous or the whole story of Christ's life is fictitious. Faith-healing is a cause which operates within such narrow limits that it is totally impossible that they can be attributed to it. It surely is time that rationalist critics ceased to appeal to it as an adequate explanation of the wonder-working power of Christ. Yet, as we have seen, they continue to employ it as an argument. Mr. Thompson would have us believe that it can cure dropsy, withered hands and every other ill which can afflict humanity. But for all this there is not a shadow of evidence. And it is difficult to know what he can mean when he says: "There is sufficient evidence, drawn partly from the stories themselves and partly from the growing body of psychological experience, to suggest that they were not originally miraculous." The verdict of medical science is most emphatically to the effect that the explanation he gives of the cases is wholly inadequate and illusory.

What we have said about the Gospel miracles may be said also about those of Lourdes. It is a fact so well-known as scarcely to need mention,

that at Lourdes a medical bureau has been in existence since the year 1882 for the purpose of verifying the cures there wrought. At this office all doctors, whatever their creed, are welcome to attend. Statistics as to the members of the profession who visited the bureau during the years 1892—1908, shew that the numbers varied between 328 (in 1901) and 109 (in 1893): a considerable proportion were from other countries than France. Many of the sick who come to Lourdes bring to the medical bureau certificates as to the nature of their complaint, given them by the practitioners who have hitherto been attending them. These are verified, and the patient, should he so desire, is personally examined. If a cure is reported, the case is promptly investigated by the doctors attending. Moreover they keep in touch with the patient until they are satisfied that the cure is permanent. No recovery, however remarkable, is included in the official statistics which has not been thus verified. Nor is any cure recognized as miraculous which only takes place gradually. It is admitted that nature sometimes effects inexplicable cures by a gradual process. No one can deny that in this way ample care is taken to avoid those fictitious miracles which owe their origin to blind credulity. Yet the statistics of cures give us seventeen different classes of maladies healed at the well. These include diseases of the digestive organs, maladies of the circulatory apparatus, lung diseases, morbid affections of the spinal cord, brain diseases, bone affections, joint diseases, tuberculosis, etc., etc. To mention one class alone in detail, the following are

the bone affections enumerated: kyphosis, scoliosis, spinal caries, osteitis, necrosis, pseudarthrosis, fracture (or results of fracture).<sup>1</sup> It surely requires more than human credulity to assume, as does Mr. Thompson, that these were cured by faith-healing.

It is equally impossible to find an explanation for stigmatization in the effects of auto-suggestion. "Medical science," says Mr. Thompson, "now recognizes stigmatization as a form of vesication. The case of Louise Lateau proves conclusively enough the nature of the phenomenon" (p. 225). Undoubtedly the doctors who accepted Charcot's views as to hysteria believed that that complaint was able to produce vesication. It is now recognized that it is absolutely incapable of so doing. For the statement that the case of Louise Lateau establishes beyond question that the stigmata were due to auto-suggestion, we are referred to F. W. H. Myers's work, *Human Personality* (i. 492). There is a sufficiently good account of the case in that work, but not a shred of evidence is there adduced to shew that the stigmata were of the character alleged. It is difficult to see how Mr. Myers's private opinion can be said to constitute conclusive proof as to the nature of the phenomenon. Virchow, we are there informed, said of the case, *ou supercherie ou miracle*. There we may leave it. All the evidence we possess goes to show that stigmatization is either pure fraud or due to a supernatural

<sup>1</sup> For further details on this subject the reader is referred to the well-known work of Dr. Boissarie, *Les Grandes Guérisons de Lourdes* (Paris, Téqui, 1900). In this work some of the most remarkable of the cures are treated by a competent medical authority.



agency. There is no reason whatever for believing that it can be produced in any other way. It will remain to be examined in the individual case whether the supernatural agency was good or evil.

It is constantly urged as an objection that Christ demanded faith as a condition of working miracles, and that the Gospels themselves bear witness that where faith was lacking He could not effect a cure. The verse is cited in which we are told regarding His brief ministry at Nazareth: "He could not do any miracles there, only that He cured a few that were sick, laying His hands on them" (Mk. vi. 5). Yet the meaning of the passage, if it be viewed in connection with the rest of the Gospel, is plain enough. And, when rightly understood, it affords no support for the opinion that faith was a physical disposition in the subject without which Christ was unable to exercise any healing influence upon him. The Gospels make it clear that He did not work His miracles purely and solely to relieve physical pain. In all of them He aimed not merely at man's temporal welfare, but at his eternal good. He worked them to win men to faith in Him as the Son of God; for by faith the New Testament signifies, not an emotional reliance on a higher power, but assent to a divine revelation. Our Lord did some of His works of healing that He might produce faith in those whose hearts He saw were not hardened against Him. Some He did as the reward of faith, that He might lead the recipients of His mercy to a completer belief in Him. But that this faith was a moral, not a physical disposition, that it was belief and not emotional receptivity to suggestion, is manifest from the fact that not



infrequently the miracle is worked to reward the faith of some other person than the patient. Thus the paralytic man was healed because of the faith of the bearers (Mk. ii. 5), the lunatic boy because of the faith of his father (Mk. ix. 22), the daughter of the Syrophenician woman to reward that of her mother (Mk. xv. 28). Among the men of Nazareth, it would appear, there were not even the rudimentary dispositions towards belief in Christ. They had made up their minds not to accept Him. In their case the working of a miracle would have done harm, not good, for it would have made their unbelief yet more inexcusable. Hence it came about that "He could not do any miracles there."

We noticed above that it is frequently asserted that faith-healing was well known and successfully employed even in pre-Christian days. The present chapter would be incomplete without at least a brief consideration of this point. It is urged that the parity between the cures sought and obtained at the temples of Aesculapius and the Christian miracles, goes far to prove that there is nothing supernatural about the latter. A review of the facts regarding these cures will show whether this is so.

The most famous of the shrines of Aesculapius was that at Epidaurus in Argolis. As to the methods pursued at this place we have fairly ample information. A main feature in the process of cure was the "incubation." The sufferer slept in the temple hoping that the god would send him a dream of significance for his cure. The interpretation of the dream was provided by the priests of Aesculapius, who were not merely the guardians of the shrine, but what is far more to the purpose, the

possessors of the medical science of the period. There is no reason to suppose that their claim to be interpreters of the message of Aesculapius was a deliberate piece of imposture. They probably believed, as did the patients, that the dreams were sent by the god. But they sought to interpret them in accordance with the recognized principles of medicine. They prescribed the best remedies they knew. And the patient doubtless often recovered. It will scarcely be said that there is much parity here with a miracle as related in the Gospel.

It is sometimes urged that the inscriptions of Epidaurus tell us of miracles that took place there. And it is perfectly true that *stelae* have been excavated there on which are engraved records of extraordinary cures. Most of the accounts thus preserved to us are absurdly fabulous. They make no claim to have been erected by the persons who had experienced the cures. Often even the name of the individual cured is not given; it is merely said that the event happened to "a certain man" (*ἀνὴρ τις*). There is little doubt that these *stelae* record the local traditions of the temple, fables perhaps several centuries old, and utterly devoid of historic value. Towards the end of the fourth century B.C., the priests, with a view to strengthen the belief of the patients in the help to be looked for from the god, caused these tales to be engraved and put up in a hall of the temple. Such are the facts regarding the "faith-healing" of Epidaurus. It is difficult to believe that anyone can advance this argument seriously.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> On the subject of the cures of Epidaurus see Pauly-Wissowa, *Real-Encyclopädie der classischen Altertumswissenschaft*, art: Asklepios, n. ix.

## CHAPTER V.

### THE EVIDENTIAL VALUE OF MIRACLES.

Various Purposes of Miraculous Works—Their Peculiar Value as Attesting a Divine Mission—M. Arnold's Objection—Objection Drawn from the Tricks of Magic.

It has been assumed by some writers that the sole purpose of miracles is to serve as the criterion of a revelation; that their function is restricted to this one end. Such a view unduly narrows their true scope, and gives quite an inadequate notion of the part which they are intended to play in God's dealings with men. It has led some to imagine that in Christian theology the one requisite in a miracle is that it should afford a display of super-human power; that in itself it is a mere marvel devoid of moral meaning, hardly differing from the tricks of magic.

According to Christian teaching a miracle is far different from this. It is invariably not merely a *wonder* (τέρας) but a *sign* (σημείον)—a manifestation of the Divine attributes. This alone distinguishes it from mere marvels and gives it a moral import of its own. As a sign it must display not only God's omnipotence but His mercy and kindness or His justice, alike in the actual miracle and in the circumstances under which it is produced. All elements that are unmeaning or ridiculous are necessarily excluded. Each miracle in its measure sets forth God's glory.

Miracles thus viewed have three main functions. (1) They mark a person as entrusted with a divine mission and thus establish the truth of a revelation. (2) They are given to attest high sanctity. They are not, of course, essential to sanctity. Yet in point of fact God frequently bears witness to the holiness of His servants by working miracles through their instrumentality or in their honour. To this last class belongs such a miracle as the stigmatization of St. Francis. (3) They are employed to confer temporal favours, to relieve suffering or sorrow. As has been said above, miracles of this kind have always an ulterior spiritual end. They are designed either to contribute to the spiritual good of the recipient, or to enable him to labour for the spiritual good of others.

Our purpose in this chapter is to consider miracles under the first aspect alone, viz.: as the criterion of a revelation.

We have pointed out in a previous chapter that the true miracle involves a direct exercise of divine power; that where a miracle is worked by a creature, that creature is acting as the immediate instrument of God. If then a man declares himself to be invested with authority to deliver a supernatural revelation to his fellows, and in testimony of his divine mission, appeals to miracles worked through his instrumentality or in answer to his prayers, the argument thus provided is irresistible. God, by granting the miracle, sets His seal to the words of His servant, and makes Himself a witness to the truth of his teaching. The exercise of divine power bears testimony to the divine origin



of the message. To suppose that a miracle could be worked in confirmation of a false doctrine is to make God a party to the falsehood. Once let it be certain that the event is a true miracle, and all possibility of doubt as to the reality of the revelation is at an end.

The miracles of Jesus Christ were precisely of this character. Again and again He appeals to His wonder-working power as a divinely-given attestation of His teaching (Mt. ix. 6, xi. 5, xii. 8, Jo. xi. 42, x. 38). He promises to afford a final proof by the resurrection of His body from the grave (Mt. xii. 40). Such too were the miracles of the apostles. They were worked "in the Name of Jesus Christ," and thus contained an express appeal to God to confirm by the miracle the doctrine which He had delivered to His Church (Acts iii. 6, xvi. 18).

It would seem plain that there can be no adequate criterion of a supernatural revelation, except a criterion which is in some sense miraculous.<sup>1</sup> A supernatural revelation is a direct interference on the part of Almighty God with the ordinary course of the world, in order that He may communicate with His creatures. The revelation, however, cannot be its own guarantee. It takes place in the first instance in the soul of the man chosen to be God's messenger, and he delivers it to his fellows by ordinary speech. Some credential he is bound to give. If he does not do so, what blame can attach to those who decline to accept his statement that he comes from God? His manifest honesty will

<sup>1</sup> Newman, *Essay I. on Miracles*, Sect. i.

not suffice, for many honest men have been deluded. How can he compel men to believe the mysteries God has revealed, and fulfil the commands He imposes on them, unless he is able to display some sign which authenticates his commission? And this sign must clearly be something which exceeds the powers of unaided nature. Thus we find that the various arguments on which men are accustomed to rely in proof of the supernatural character of the Christian religion are all appeals to events of a miraculous character. The argument from the sublime and sinless character of Christ Himself is valid, precisely because such sinlessness manifestly transcends the powers of fallen man. If the rapid spread of the Gospel through all classes in the Roman Empire is urged, it is because this rapid advance is regarded as impossible apart from divine assistance. If again our attention is drawn to the moral transformation which accompanied the progress of the Church, and everywhere bore such extraordinary fruits of sanctity, it is because the natural forces of human nature are quite inadequate to such a result. It is true, of course, that the physical miracles with which in this work we are more particularly concerned, are not absolutely essential. But it is not to be denied that they are in a special way suited to the effect aimed at. For God's message is for all, for young as well as old, poor as well as rich. And physical miracles inasmuch as they appeal to sense as well as to reason, are such as to carry conviction to the minds of all without exception, simple and learned alike, and are less re-

stricted in their appeal than those others we have just mentioned.

Nor is it the case, as has sometimes been asserted,<sup>1</sup> that the evidence of a physical miracle is only efficacious in regard to those who have witnessed it. It is no less so for those who hear it on sound and reliable authority. Given adequate evidence of an historic fact, I cease to have any doubt that it really occurred, whether it belongs to the present day or to the times of William the Conqueror. So long as I am indubitably in possession of trustworthy original evidence, I accept the fact as certain. So is it in the case of miracles. Mozley has well said: "The evidence of a miracle is not only contemporary with the miracle, but extends in the nature of the case through all subsequent ages into which the original testimony is transmitted. The chain of testimony is indeed more and more lengthened out, and every fresh link which is added is a step further from the starting point, but so long as the original testimony reaches us, through however many links, the miracle which it attests is the same evidence that it ever was . . .

- The testimony to the battle of Pharsalia is as strong now as at its first insertion in the page of history; nor can we entertain the notion of a time, however remote, when it will not be as strong as it is now. Whatever value, then, the testimony to the Christian miracles had, when that testimony first took its place in public records, that it has now and that it will continue to have so long as the world lasts."<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> E.g., by Martineau, *Seat of Authority in Religion*, p. 310. Sabatier, *Esquisse, &c.*, p. 46.

<sup>2</sup> *Lectures on Miracles*, p. 29.



It has been sometimes said that we possess an adequate criterion of Christianity in its perfect adaptation to human nature and to human needs. This, it is contended, guarantees it as the true religion. Now no one would deny the value of the argument from this source. The harmony of Christian belief with the truths of natural reason, the sublimity of its doctrines as to God and as to man, the exalted hopes which it holds out to all alike, and again the marvellous wisdom of its moral code as regards not merely the individual, but also the family and the state—all these shew us beyond a doubt that if any religion on earth can claim to be revealed it must be the Christian religion. Nevertheless all this falls short of proof that it is in fact a revelation, an immediate communication from God Himself. Unless some further guarantee be forthcoming that Jesus Christ was, as He claimed to be, a Divine Being, the haunting fear will ever remain with us that His religion may after all be the mere fruit of human wisdom, a work indeed of transcendent genius, but when all is said and done, a human work. Reason can recognize that the doctrines which, in the stricter sense, constitute the Christian revelation, the doctrines of the Trinity, the Incarnation, the Atonement and Grace, are sublime above measure, and that they offer man a destiny beyond anything he could have imagined. But this does not shew that they are true. Indeed, it is in the very nature of things impossible to offer any proof of these doctrines drawn from internal reasons. They are by hypothesis mysteries. Even when revealed the human intellect can only inade-



quately grasp them. Hence reason cannot demonstrate their truth from their internal character; the only proof of which they are capable is an extrinsic proof.

A recent rationalist writer has said: "No great religion which has by the innate force and truth of its teachings gained for itself the support of a large number of the educated and intelligent races of mankind, should be required to prove its truth by miracles. The great truths of the Bible . . . should be independent of the supposed miracles contained in it."<sup>1</sup> The objection is plausible at first sight. But in point of fact it could only be valid on the supposition that the religion of the Bible was a purely natural religion. Granted that God has in Holy Scripture revealed truths which man could not otherwise know, it is plainly false.

When, however, we claim that physical miracles are in a special manner adapted to authenticate a revelation, it should be noted that in this regard miracles may differ widely one from another according to accidental differences of periods or of persons.<sup>2</sup> With the advance of medical science certain miracles, *e.g.*, the healing of the lame man at the gate of the temple, may seem to us even more inexplicable than to their contemporaries. And on the other hand the healing of the paralytic may to some carry less force now than of old. For this miracle is open to the objection, however improbable, that it may have been a case of hysterical paralysis curable by suggestion. Again that our

<sup>1</sup> *The Search after Truth*, by Philalethes, p. 137.

<sup>2</sup> Newman, *Essay I. on Miracles*, p. 8.

Lord should have delivered the possessed from the alien personality dominating them, is a positive difficulty to those who have been trained to believe that possession is an idle tale. In such cases the miracles are accepted as parts of a system otherwise sufficiently guaranteed. We occasionally hear it said that if miracles are to be accepted at all, they must be accepted as part of our Christian belief and cannot be made the ground of it. The statement taken in its entirety is a manifest paradox. But as regards the few miracles of which we are speaking it is true. They depend on the rest for support.

Matthew Arnold believed he had sufficiently demolished the argument from miracles by asking whether, if he could turn the pen with which he was writing into a penwiper, he would thereby make what he was writing more true. And this, he asserts, is what is practically held by those who look on miracles as a criterion of truth. The objection is so often repeated that it seems necessary to notice it. Yet it is chiefly remarkable for its extreme ineptitude. It is, of course, quite true that a transformation such as he describes would add no weight to his words; and this, for the simple reason that it lacks the essential characteristics of a miracle. A miracle, as we have already said, is always a manifestation of the divine attributes. The character of the work is such as to show forth God's goodness and holiness. When a man claiming to be sent from God does such works in His Name, the works authenticate his words, for they are miracles. But who has ever maintained that if a man claiming no divine message should perform an idle

conjuring trick, he would thereby gain a right to be believed, or that anyone would lend credence to him on such a ground as that?

What at first sight is a more plausible objection is drawn from the tales of miraculous occurrences which are found in other religious systems besides the Christian. It is asked whether under these circumstances the Christian religion has, as regards the proof from miracles, any better claim than they to be a divine revelation.

Mr. Thompson writes: "It has been the great weakness of most books on the subject of miracles that they have assumed as though it needed no proving, that the Christian miracles are different from any other. . . . Whereas anyone who studies history soon discovers that no such gulf exists. . . . Everyone knows of the faith-healing practised in Greece before Christianity (and still practised), of the miracles of Apollonius of Tyana, of the history of the King's touch, and of many other facts. . . . The story that D. D. Home, the medium, floated out of a room by one window and in by another is better authenticated than any miracle story in the Bible. . . . How can we assert that they (the Gospel miracles) have any evidential value?"<sup>1</sup>

It will be worth while to consider what weight attaches to each of the cases here mentioned. The faith-healing known in Greece before Christianity we have already had occasion to notice. We have seen that no argument whatever can be drawn from such cures as took place at Epidaurus.

The miracles of Apollonius are a still more

<sup>1</sup> In the *Guardian* newspaper, Sept. 1, 1911.

slender foundation on which to build. He was a man of but little importance in his own day. He is not so much as mentioned by a single contemporary author though the scene of his actions is placed in Rome, Athens and Alexandria, and his period, the first century after Christ, is one as to which we have ample information. He appears to have been addicted to magic and to have founded some sort of community which soon expired. But his reputed magical powers procured him the honour of local worship at his birthplace Tyana. About a hundred years after his death the Roman army was delayed at Tyana in the course of a march to Syria. The Empress Julia Domna became interested in his story, and bade Philostratus, a literary man in the court circle, write a work in his honour. That work we still possess. It is not a biography, and makes no pretence to be so. It is a romance—a picture of the ideal sage. "We have to deal," says Professor Phillimore, "with a romance; not an amatory sentimental romance, but a philosophical and historical romance"; and again: "the *Apollonius* is a book in which criticism almost unanimously recognizes a fiction."<sup>1</sup> Of the real history and character of Apollonius we know practically nothing. The author in picturing the ideal sage introduced traits drawn from many sources. He even laid the Christian Gospels under contribution. There is scarcely a fact in the work of which it can be said that it is historical. Most certainly this cannot be said of the miracles. What

<sup>1</sup> Philostratus, *Apollonius of Tyana*, translated by J. S. Phillimore, 1912, p. xviii.

parity then, it may well be asked, have Philostratus's tales of Apollonius, with the evidence given by the evangelists for the facts of our Lord's life, facts in testimony of whose truth they were prepared to lay down their lives?

The character both of the *Apollonius* of Philostratus and of the "miracles" of Epidaurus, are matters of such common note that it is impossible to suppose that Mr. Thompson was ignorant of their value. It may well excite surprise that he should employ arguments such as these.

As regards the history of the King's touch, it will be time to discuss this question, when any well-authenticated case of a miracle thus worked has been discovered. Till this is done there is little ground for the assertion that the evidential value of the Gospel miracles is weakened by the popular belief that the successors of St. Edward had power to heal scrofula by their touch.

All then that remains of Mr. Thompson's argument are the marvels performed by D. D. Home. It certainly would be very hard to explain away the evidence for the extraordinary feat in question. The late Lord Crawford, F.R.S., Lord Adare, and Capt. Wynne, all testified that in 1871 they witnessed Home float from one room to another, the windows being some seventy feet from the ground, and there being no foothold whatever between them. After his appearance in the room where they were gathered, Lord Adare, we are told, went into the next room to see the window from which he had been carried. It was raised about eighteen inches, and he expressed his wonder how Home

had been taken through so narrow an aperture. Home said, still entranced, "I will show you," and then with his back to the window, he leaned back and was shot out of the window head first, with the body rigid, and then returned quite quietly.<sup>1</sup> Certainly, an astounding marvel. Yet who save under the exigencies of controversy would say that there was no gulf between this kind of thing and the Gospel miracles? The latter were worked in the power of Almighty God and in order to manifest His love, His holiness, His sympathy with suffering men. Home's tricks were done to minister to an unhealthy curiosity, and professedly by the aid of "spirits." Such commerce with unseen powers as he practised is nothing new in the world's history. The Catholic Church has throughout the centuries admitted its possibility, and warned men that the agencies at work in it are not good but evil. Theologians are at one in holding that in the phenomena of spiritualism, amid a large amount of imposture there is a residuum which is due to diabolic action. Home at one period of his life had abjured these practices and sought reception into the Catholic Church. But a man who has once trafficked with evil spirits, can only avoid them at the cost of an arduous struggle. Home unhappily yielded to temptation, and returned to his dealings with the unseen world.<sup>2</sup>

But, it may fairly be asked, does not the admission that the powers of evil can work such effects

<sup>1</sup> See Lang, *Making of Religion*, Appendix B.

<sup>2</sup> See De Ponlevoy, *Vie du P. X. de Ravignan*, ii. 298 (Paris, 1860).

as these, carry with it very serious consequences? What guarantee can we then have in regard to any miraculous occurrence, that it comes from God and not from the devil?

In reply to this difficulty it may be said in the first place that there are some miracles which are indubitably of divine origin, inasmuch as they presuppose creative power. Such, *e.g.*, is the resuscitation of the dead, and such too any miracle of healing which involves the sudden restoration of some lost organ. The phenomena of spiritualism are never of this kind. Even though it may be apparent that they are not the spontaneous result of natural forces, yet it is always conceivable that they may have been produced without the violation of natural law. Is there anything improbable in the supposition that Home was carried through the air by the spirits with which he had dealings? It would appear to be a general principle of creation that the powers possessed by a lower order of beings, are found also in the higher. Since men can lift a body and convey it from place to place, it is legitimate to hold that spiritual beings can in given circumstances do the same. Ordinarily, doubtless, they are withheld from interference in human affairs. But granted that a man chooses to engage in illicit commerce with evil spirits, it does not seem unreasonable to hold that this takes place in his case.

It may be urged that this principle only guarantees those few miracles in which divine power is conspicuously present. How are we to tell in the less evident cases, *e.g.*, in cases of levita-



tion such as that we have just been considering, or in regard of cures of a less striking character, whether they are the work of God or of the devil?

The difficulty here presented is academic rather than practical. The question at issue is always, not whether an isolated occurrence is miraculous, but whether a wonder-worker is a messenger of God divinely accredited by supernatural powers, or a mere deceiver. This is a matter more easily settled. If a man is sent by God, it is probable that some at least of his miracles will be clearly of divine origin. Where evil spirits are operative, not merely is there no miracle to which we can point as unmistakably of divine origin, but their presence is accustomed to betray itself in the nature of many of the marvels wrought, and in the character of the worker. This last point is of primary importance. When God confers habitual miraculous powers on men, He accompanies this gift with that of sanctity. Hence if a man is seen not to be free from pride and other moral blemishes, if he furthers his own interests and is on the look-out for popular applause, there can be little doubt that he is a wilful deceiver, or at least fatally deceived as to the nature of the power he wields.

It has sometimes been said that in arguing from the character of the wonder-worker, we fall into a vicious circle; that we establish the claims of the messenger by the miracles, and the claim of the miracles by the messenger. No better proof could be wanted, it is said, that miracles are useless as a proof of revelation, that they add nothing to the criterion we already possess in the sanctity

of the preacher. It is, however, easy to show that our reasoning is perfectly valid, and that the charge of arguing in a circle is undeserved. Sanctity, provided that it has been shown in many a hard trial to be true metal and no counterfeit, proves that the marvels wrought are not from the devil but from God. Humility and self-renunciation are not found in those who are serving the cause of Satan. The miracles are necessary, not to establish the sanctity of the worker, but to convince us that his message is a divine revelation. His sanctity alone, apart from any miracle, could not have given us full assurance of that. Many virtuous men have deluded themselves into believing that they were the recipients of divine communications. Savonarola was a man of high virtue. No one suspects him of falsehood. But it is still a matter of dispute whether the revelations he claimed to receive were not due, however unconsciously, to the workings of his own mind. Had he performed miracles in confirmation of his message, none could have doubted it.

If the sanctity of the preacher, when taken by itself, cannot guarantee a revelation, the same must be said as regards the character of the doctrine. Its value as a criterion is negative rather than positive. It is true that should it be immoral or self-contradictory, we should know that it was not from God. But even if it should contain elements of truth, we should have no certainty as to its author. The powers of evil are sufficiently astute not to begin with manifest falsehood. It is true enough that:

“ Oftentimes to win us to our harm  
The instruments of darkness tell us truths,  
Win us with honest trifles to betray us  
In deepest consequence.”

The message cannot be its own authentication. It must be authenticated by a sign from God, a miracle, whether in the physical or moral order. And though it be true that it behoves us to be on our guard against those “ lying wonders,” whose object is to lead us astray; yet the considerations advanced in this chapter will have shown that the false and true are not indistinguishable. Those who are deceived, err through their own fault.

## CHAPTER VI.

### THE MIRACLES OF THE GOSPEL.

Testimony of the Gospels Regarding the Miracles—Arguments on Behalf of the Miracles: (1) from the Early Date of the Synoptic Writings; (2) from the Circumstances of the Infant Church; (3) from the Apostolic Gift of Miracles—General Conclusions from the Arguments—Rationalist Explanations of the Miracles.

#### I.

IT is known to everyone that during the last two centuries the most determined efforts have been made to invalidate the testimony of the Gospels regarding the miracles of Christ, and that a vast amount of labour has been devoted by eminent scholars to this object. Our purpose in this chapter is to show that, notwithstanding these attacks, the case for the truth of Christ's miracles remains unshaken, that the arguments for the substantial accuracy of the Gospel record on this point are so cogent, that the honest mind can have no room for doubt that these events really occurred.

It will be well, by way of preliminary, briefly to summarize what the Gospels relate regarding the miraculous works which marked the ministry of our Lord. They give us to understand that throughout the ministry the working of miracles was practically continuous, that the number of sick healed in this manner was so great as to make a detailed enumeration quite impossible. Of the early days of His preaching St. Matthew tells us: "His fame went throughout all Syria, and they presented to Him all sick people that were taken

with divers diseases . . . and He cured them " (Mt. iv. 24). St. Mark describes the scene at Capharnaum, when "all the city was gathered together at the door, and He healed many that were troubled with divers diseases " (Mk. i. 34; cf. Mt. viii. 16; Luke iv. 40). St. Luke, after relating the healing of the man full of leprosy, says: "The fame of Him went abroad the more, and great multitudes came together to hear and to be healed of their infirmities " (Luke v. 15; cf. Mk. i. 45). At a later period, immediately after the feeding of the five thousand, we are told: "Whithersoever He entered into towns or into villages or cities, they laid the sick in the streets, and besought Him that they might touch but the hem of His garments; and as many as touched Him were made whole " (Mk. vi. 56; cf. Mt. viii. 16, 17; Luke iv. 40).<sup>1</sup> The testimony of the fourth Gospel is to the same effect. St. John narrates how the people of Jerusalem exclaimed: "When the Christ cometh, shall He do more miracles than these which this man doth " (John vii. 31).

Of this multitude of miracles the evangelists have described individually only a few. The number of those which they thus record, is variously estimated by different authors at from thirty-three to forty. This discrepancy is due to there being certain incidents, *e.g.*, the escape of our Lord at Nazareth (Luke iv. 30): the expulsion of the money changers (Matt. xxi. 12), &c: as to which we are uncertain whether they were miraculous or

<sup>1</sup> Cf. Matt. ix. 35, xi. 4, 5, xv. 29-31, xix. 1; Luke vi. 17-19, vii. 21.

not. If we adopt the reckoning which puts the number at thirty-five, their distribution in the Gospels is as follows. One miracle alone, the feeding of the five thousand, is found in all four evangelists. Eleven occur in three of the Gospels, ten of these being found in the three Synoptists, and one—the walking on the water—in Matthew, Mark and John. Six miracles have the authority of two evangelists, three being common to Matthew and Mark, two to Matthew and Luke, and one to Mark and Luke. Seventeen are found in but one Gospel; of these, three are peculiar to St. Matthew, two to St. Mark, six to St. Luke, and six again to St. John. As regards the character of the miracles, three are raisings from the dead; nine display our Lord's power over external nature; the remainder are either works of healing or deliverances of the possessed. Those authors who believe that the expulsion of the money-changers and other like incidents in our Lord's life were really miraculous, add yet another class, comprising those occasions in which He exercised a supernatural power over the wills of men.

(1) Our first argument is drawn from the acknowledged date of the Synoptic Gospels. There was a time when the liberal critics were accustomed to assign the most extravagant dates for their composition. Strauss in his *New Life of Jesus* (§ 11), written in 1864, asserts that probably not one of them was written earlier than 150 A.D. It soon, however, became manifest that such a view was in complete opposition to all the evidence; and in recent years there has been a notable return towards

the traditional dates. All criticism that is based on historical considerations (as distinguished from that which is purely arbitrary) tends more and more to the conclusion that they appeared in their present form between 60 A.D. and 85 A.D. Catholic writers as a rule place them between the years 60 and 70; Protestants incline rather to the period between 70 to 85. But how close the approximation is, may be seen by comparing the dates assigned respectively by M. Jacquier, Prof. Zahn and Prof. Harnack. M. Jacquier may be taken as representing Catholic opinion, Prof. Zahn as a critic of conservative tendencies, and Prof. Harnack as an exponent of liberal criticism. The dates given by M. Jacquier are: Matthew, previous to 70; Mark, 64—67; Luke, 60—70. Zahn gives as follows: Matthew, 62 (Aramaic original), 85 (Greek trans.); Mark, before 70; Luke, 75. Harnack's conclusions are not notably different. He gives: Matthew, 70—85; Mark, before 60; Luke, 60—70.

Moreover, very considerable agreement has now been reached as regards the authorship of the Gospels. All except the more extreme liberals admit that the second Gospel is the work of Mark, and is based on the personal recollections of St. Peter. The grounds on which a few critics (Loisy, Schmiedel, J. Weiss, A. Réville) still refuse to acknowledge him as the immediate author, are of little weight. The third Gospel is also recognized as unquestionably the work of Luke the physician, the companion of St. Paul. There is more diversity of opinion regarding the first Gospel. In its present form the liberal critics deny its authenticity. They hold

however, that it embodies an earlier work, a collection of the discourses of our Lord written in the Aramaic language, and this they are prepared to acknowledge as in all probability the composition of St. Matthew. This hypothetical writing is now usually spoken of as "Q." Catholic writers on the other hand, have always held that the arguments for the Matthæan authorship of the whole Gospel are of decisive force. They hold that the statements of Papias and Irenæus, to the effect that St. Matthew composed a Gospel in the Aramaic vernacular of Palestine, refer indubitably to our present first Gospel: that the Greek version is a translation, not a compilation by another hand.<sup>1</sup>

The question as to the historical value of the Gospels is complicated by what is known as the Synoptic problem—the problem, that is, as to the relation in which these works stand to one another. Every manner of hypothesis has been suggested to account for the remarkable resemblances and no less striking differences between them. It may be that our information is in fact too scanty for us ever to attain a final solution of the question. Catholic writers on the whole favour the view that there were in existence various partial lives of our Lord, collections of discourses, &c., in circulation among the disciples (Luke i. 3), and that some of these were employed by each of the evangelists in the composition of their respective works. The liberal critics

<sup>1</sup> For Catholics this view has recently received authoritative sanction from a decree of the Biblical Commission, 19 June, 1911. Among Protestant critics, Professor Zahn, an authority of the very highest rank, has constantly maintained that the traditional account is correct.



prefer the solution that St. Mark's Gospel was the earliest to be written, that the author of the first Gospel availed himself of St. Mark's work and of Q, embodying the discourses of Q (together with a certain amount of material from other sources) in a framework formed by narrative portions of St. Mark. St. Luke, they hold, proceeded in much the same manner, but he was more amply provided with other sources as to whose historical value he was satisfied.

It is plain that at first sight this theory seems considerably to lessen the amount of evidence for the miracles of the Gospel. If the authors of the first and third Gospels simply embodied the work of St. Mark, and if the only purely apostolic portions of the three works are certain extracts from a collection of discourses, it would seem that, instead of three witnesses to the miracles, we have but one, and that his testimony is given at second hand. It is not, however, hard to show, that even if for the sake of argument we accept this theory of the critics (which all Catholics are agreed in rejecting), every principle of evidence compels us none the less to admit that the three Gospels furnish ample proof of the miracles of Christ as an unquestionable truth.

We possess according to this theory at least three original sources that go back to the apostolic period—the Gospel of St. Mark, Q, the special source of St. Luke. Not one of them can reasonably be dated later than 70 A.D. Q is admitted to be of considerably earlier date than this. All of them without exception represent our Lord's ministry as

miraculous. The Gospel of St. Mark has often been called the Gospel of Miracles. As regards Q, since it was primarily a collection of discourses, no surprise need have been felt had there been no mention of such incidents. Yet though the critics differ among themselves as to what was contained in this source and what not, there is a wide consensus that to it must be assigned not merely the healing of the centurion's servant (Mt. viii. 5—13), but also Christ's distinct assertion in His reply to the messengers of John the Baptist, that amongst His other miracles, He had even raised the dead (Mt. xi. 5), His reproaches against Corozain and Bethsaida for neglect of the signs done amongst them (Mt. xi. 21), and His declaration that it is by the power of God that He drives the devils from the possessed (Mt. xii. 28). St. Luke's special source gives us the raising of the widow's son at Naim (Luke vii. 11—18), the healing of the woman with the spirit of infirmity (Luke xiii. 11—17), of the man with dropsy (Luke xiv. 1—6), and of the ten lepers (Luke xvii. 12—19).

The conclusion from this is surely plain. All admit that the Synoptists were in good faith: that they themselves believed what they have set down. Moreover what they believed was the common belief of the Christians of the day. For these Gospels were from the first accepted by the Christian communities as authentic lives in full accordance with apostolic tradition. And this was at a time when almost every adult Christian throughout Palestine, and an immense number of converts in other parts, had seen the apostles themselves, and had heard

from their own lips the story of their Master's life. This alone puts it beyond all doubt that in these writings we have the portraiture of Christ as given by the Apostles themselves. It is inconceivable that the men of that generation would have held these books as the most precious possession of the Church, unless they had known from the apostles' own testimony that such indeed had been the works of Jesus Christ. We may cite the words of Strauss himself as to the importance of this point. "It would," he says, "most unquestionably be an argument of decisive weight in favour of the credibility of the biblical history, could it indeed be shewn that it was written by eye-witnesses or even by persons nearly connected with the events narrated."<sup>1</sup> Strauss knew well that time is needed for the development of legends. Legends grow up round the great personages of the past, when an authentic account of them is no longer obtainable. But an account of a life universally accepted as veracious at a time when numerous contemporaries are still living, cannot be otherwise than substantially accurate. Strauss's theory of a second-century date for the Gospels is now universally admitted to be indefensible. We may fairly demand that the legitimate conclusion should be drawn.

(2) Another argument no less convincing is to be found in the circumstances under which the infant Church was formed. It was at Jerusalem that the apostles began their labours. There they first preached belief in Jesus Christ the Son of

<sup>1</sup> *Life of Jesus* (Eng. trans.), 1846, p. 55.

God. It was there first that a community was established which worshipped Him as enthroned in glory, as the giver of the Holy Spirit to His followers, and as about in due time to return to judge all men at the last day. This preaching began on the day of Pentecost, seven weeks only after the Passion. It was carried on in Jerusalem for years. According to the most probable chronology the Crucifixion of our Lord took place in 29 A.D., while the persecution of Herod which occasioned the dispersal of the apostles, did not occur till 44 A.D. For a period, then, of about fifteen years the apostolic preaching was directed almost entirely to the Jews of the capital. We have in the Acts some examples of this early preaching, and the records there preserved show us that the apostles appealed to our Lord's miracles as to indisputable and notorious facts. St. Peter is represented as beginning his speech on the day of Pentecost in these terms: "Ye men of Israel, hear these words: Jesus of Nazareth, a man approved of God among you by miracles and wonders and signs, which God did by him in the midst of you, as you also know" (Acts ii. 22). And similarly when addressing the household of Cornelius, he says: "You know the word which hath been published through all Judæa: . . . Jesus of Nazareth; how God anointed him with the Holy Ghost and with power, who went about doing good and healing all that were oppressed with the devil: for God was with him" (Acts x. 38). That this preaching was extremely successful is a matter of history; and further, it is clear that the converts were drawn not merely from

the poorer classes but from the priests and the Pharisees also (Acts vii. 7, xv. 5). Now it is out of the question that this could have taken place had not the miraculous powers of Jesus Christ been well known to all. The men to whom the appeal was made had witnessed His preaching, and knew what His ministry had been. With what possibility of success could the apostles have thus addressed them, if, as the critics say, He had but performed a few "faith-cures" on nervous diseases? The environment was fiercely hostile.

The establishment of the infant Church in Jerusalem itself in face of those who were bound, if they could, to deny that Jesus of Nazareth was anything but an impostor, demands an explanation. Such an event could not have come to pass without an adequate cause. The only cause which can be assigned with the smallest show of probability is that those who were in the best position to form a judgment, who were indeed for the most part themselves first-hand witnesses, were satisfied that the miracles were actual facts. Indeed, had they not been satisfied as to their reality, the very existence of a Christian community in Jerusalem would have been an impossibility.

It is often said that the age was an uncritical one; that men were credulous regarding the marvellous, and were ready to accept tales which no reasonable man would now believe. The statements made on this head are often gross exaggerations. The Jews were a prosperous and well-educated people; their better classes were in full touch with the civilization of the day. The

peasantry of Galilee were by no means sunk in barbarous ignorance. They were an industrious race living on one of the high-roads of commerce; and without doubt had the alertness which such a situation always brings. It is true that there was a keener sense of the supernatural among the Jews than there is amongst Englishmen to-day; and it may well be that some fictitious tales gained currency amongst them. But this does not prove that in no case had they full and ample evidence for their beliefs. We should scarcely be ready to admit the argument, that because there are many spurious antiques, it follows of necessity that every picture attributed to Raphael is a forgery. Moreover it is to be noted that those tales of the marvellous to which men give an uncritical assent, exercise little or no influence upon their action. The kind of assent which the rationalist would attribute to the first Christians would have had none of the effects which their belief in fact produced. "Superstition," Newman has well said, "while it might facilitate the bare admission of miraculous events, would at the same time have weakened their practical influence. Miracles ceasing to be accounted strange, would cease to be striking also."<sup>1</sup> There is in fact one case in which no man will believe without due evidence, and that is when the narrative which he is asked to accept affects his personal interests detrimentally. Now it will hardly be denied that belief in the Resurrection and in those other narratives regarding Christ's life which were bound up with it, involved the most mo-

<sup>1</sup> *Essay I on Miracles*, p. 85.

mentous and unpalatable consequences for those who received them as true, and acknowledged Him as their Lord. It involved a total reformation of their whole life: a renunciation of all that social intercourse with the world around which is based on common beliefs and common principles, and a strict obligation to bear all manner of suffering and persecution that should arise; and in most cases a severance of the nearest and dearest ties of flesh and blood.

Even one alone of the consequences we have named would have made men weigh well the evidence regarding the life of Christ. And if additional proof be yet required, it may be noted that the doctrine did not spread only among the Jews, who it is said, were greedy of the marvellous, but among the Gentiles of Greece and Rome and even among that cultivated section of the population which had long renounced belief in the fables of their own religion. Its spread was not unopposed, for in every city - the Jewish Diaspora displayed the most active hostility. But no substantial refutation of the facts was ever made. Under such circumstances, we maintain, the argument derived from the acceptance of the facts by contemporaries, is such as to command the assent of every reasonable man.

(3) The clear and explicit claim made by St. Paul that in virtue of his apostolic authority he habitually wrought miracles, is only explicable on the supposition not merely that he in fact exercised this power, but also that Christ possessed and exercised it before him, that it was his by delegation from Christ. Writing to the Corinthians regarding

his own sojourn among them, he says: "Truly the signs of an apostle were wrought among you in all patience, by signs and wonders and mighty works" (II Cor. xii. 12, R.V.). And in his Epistle to the Romans he speaks of those things which Christ wrought through him "for the obedience of the Gentiles, by word and deed, by virtue of signs and wonders, in the power of the Holy Ghost" (Rom. xv. 18), a passage which implies that these works had been the occasion of widespread conversions to the faith. Again in the Epistle to the Galatians he speaks in the following terms of his work amongst them: "He therefore who giveth you the Spirit and worketh miracles among you, doth he do it by the works of the law or by the hearing of faith?" (Gal. iii. 5). Moreover he informs us elsewhere (I Cor. xii. 28) that the power to work miracles was among the charismatic gifts bestowed by the Holy Ghost on the primitive Church. This evidence cannot be set aside. St. Paul was not a hysterical subject living in a cloudland spun out of his own fancies, but a man endowed with a practical genius of the very highest order—a man who did a work in the world which centuries have not undone. And he appeals to his miracles again and again in writings destined for publicity, not stating the fact as something as yet unknown to his readers, something which they were to believe but could not test for themselves, but as a thing to which they could themselves bear personal witness, and as to which there was and could be no dispute. Dr. Sanday says with reason: "In truth the force of evidence could go no further . . . To reject



evidence of this kind would be a stronger measure than to reject miracle."<sup>1</sup>

It is needless to say that St. Paul would never have believed himself to possess powers higher than those of his Divine Master. Whatever endowments the apostle enjoyed, were the gift of Christ. Thus St. Paul's claim to work miracles involves the belief that Christ had possessed this power and had communicated it to His servants.

We are sometimes reminded that in St. Paul's writings there are no references to the miracles, or indeed to any part of the ministerial life of Christ. And it is urged that this points inevitably to the conclusion that these things were devoid of all interest for him: that his mind was occupied, not with any earthly life of Christ, but with the glorified Christ of his theology: and that the same was probably the case with most of the early disciples. What then is more likely, we are asked, than that the true facts regarding Christ's life should have been forgotten? Arguments from silence are always dangerous; but a weaker one than this it would be hard to imagine. The epistles are not a systematic exposition of Christian dogma. They are occasional writings, each with a special purpose of its own. It did not fall within St. Paul's scope in any of them to dwell on the incidents of our Lord's life: he was treating of other matters. It has been well argued that if by some mischance the first Epistle to the Corinthians had been lost, the references to the Holy Eucharist and to the Resurrection in the writings of St. Paul, would be

<sup>1</sup> *Miracles*, art. "The Meaning of Miracle," p. 5.

of the slightest. In that case the rationalists would doubtless have declared that he was manifestly ignorant of these truths. We know now how fallacious the argument would have been.<sup>1</sup> The fact is that the early disciples were well instructed regarding the facts of our Lord's life, and there was no call for the apostle to treat of them in his letters.

Once more, if we consider the internal evidence, the very character of these stories guarantees their truth. When supernatural tales are invented to accredit the claims of some alleged prophet, exaggeration invariably creeps in. The element of the marvellous assumes an undue prominence. The sole purpose of the miracle appears to be the display of thaumaturgic power. In the Gospel miracles on the other hand, no feature is more marked than the absence of this element of display. Although Christ points to His miracles as the proof of His divine mission (Mk. ii. 10, xi. 2—7, Jo. x. 38, &c.), never does He work one for the mere purpose of exhibiting His power over nature. Challenged to do so He peremptorily refuses. Each exercise of His power arises naturally out of the circumstances, and each serves to throw light on His principles and method. Not one of them gives the impression of being the invention of some disciple over-eager for the marvellous. Both internal and external evidence testify to the reality of the facts.

Other lines of argument might be indicated. But those which we have employed appear to be amply sufficient to put the miraculous powers of Jesus Christ beyond all question.

<sup>1</sup> *Vide* Dr. Headlam in *Miracles*, p. 53.

If this be once established, then most assuredly it follows that there can be no ground for doubting the literal and historical truth of the miracle-stories as they are related in the Gospels. It may safely be said that in the whole of Greek and Latin literature no books are better authenticated than these. The *History* of Thucydides, the *Memorabilia* of Xenophon, the *Annals* of Tacitus, and many another famous work as to whose authenticity no one entertains a doubt, cannot boast of a fraction of the evidence which is forthcoming on their behalf. The men who wrote them were admirably situated to know the truth. It would be hard to find better qualified witnesses. Of their veracity there can be no doubt. The elementary principles of their religion made wilful falsehood impossible. They wrote, too, for men to whom the matter with which they dealt was well-known. Every Christian was familiar with the outlines of the life of Christ. It formed the subject of the catechetical instruction given to converts. No deviation from tradition would have been tolerated. The assumption of certain rationalists that the Christians of the second generation were prepared to swallow any old-wives'-tale regarding the life of our Lord is, historically speaking, grotesque.<sup>1</sup> And if the Evangelists are to be trusted as regards the miracles of healing, they can be trusted likewise as regards the nature-miracles. According to the Gospels not merely was there a continuous exercise of the

<sup>1</sup> Mr. Thompson writes regarding St. Mark's Gospel: "Many of the stories that Mark sets down he may have heard years before as part of the gossip of his mother's friends." *Miracles of the N.T.*, p. 30.

healing ministry, but there were no failures. There is not a hint, not a suspicion that there were any limits to Christ's power. As we have already shown, the solitary passage which is sometimes cited in the contrary sense, has, if rightly understood, a very different meaning. But a healing power of this kind, a power universal in its range and instantaneous in its effects, a power to which death itself was subject, is a power over nature's laws. There is no room here for that hypothesis of faith-cures, which is so much in favour with rationalists at the present day. That method is powerless before organic complaints. To accept this hypothesis it would be necessary to suppose that the whole sick population of Palestine at the time of Christ, was afflicted with a single form of disease, that the one and only malady prevalent was hysteria. If Christ worked these cures—and the fact is admitted even by rationalists—then He possessed power over nature's laws, and we have no more reason to reject the testimony of the Evangelist when he tells us that Christ walked upon the waves, than when he tells us that He cured the leper.

## II.

On the rationalist side several theories have been suggested in order to explain away the Gospel story. Some mention of these attempts seems called for here. It will be sufficient for our purpose, if we mention those who may be reckoned as the founders of the different theories.

(1) According to H. S. Reimarus (1694—1768) the miracles were mere frauds. Jesus Christ was a claimant to the messianic dignity, and miracles were a sheer necessity if He desired to induce the people to accept His claims. Hence He did not scruple to adopt this device. The resurrection-story told after His death by the apostles was a lie from beginning to end; the body had been abstracted by themselves. Reimarus did not venture to publish his writings, but was accustomed to lend them in manuscript to his friends for perusal. He passed with the world for an orthodox Lutheran, going regularly to their Sunday service and Holy Communion. His treatises were published after his death by Lessing (1774—1778). But the view was too monstrous to find any wide acceptance.

(2) H. E. G. Paulus (1761—1851) advocated what is known as the rationalist explanation of the miracles. He held them to be mere misinterpretations of purely natural events. Jesus cured the sick partly by psychical power, partly by natural remedies. The oil with which He sent out the apostles on their mission (Mk. vi. 13), was a medicinal oil. He doubtless prescribed a suitable dietary to His patients, though the apostles do not mention it. The walking on the water was a mistake on the part of the apostles. He was really walking on the shore, and they were deceived by the mist. As to Jairus's daughter Jesus had a presentiment that she was not dead but only in a catalepsy, and merely went and woke her from it. The impossi-



bility of this theory as a general explanation of the miracles has long been recognized by everyone.

(3) D. F. Strauss (1808—1874), while pointing out the complete impossibility of the previous naturalistic interpretations, introduced the mythological theory. He held that in the course of the century which followed the death of Jesus, much legendary matter had gathered round His memory. In some cases His sayings had been elaborated into miracles. Thus the expression "fishers of men" had been transformed into the story of the miraculous draught. More often the legends were due to the desire to see in Him the adequate fulfilment of all O.T. prophecy. Strauss owned, however, that his theory depended for its validity on the late date which he assigned to the Gospels. Myths do not grow up in the first generation, they necessarily suppose a considerable interval to have elapsed since the death of the man to whom they are referred.

Since Strauss's time, the interval which he assumed has been shown to be non-existent. It follows that the mythical theory has as little basis as those which preceded it. Yet no other hypothesis remained. Hence, since the time of Strauss, the liberal critics have pursued an eclectic method. They perforce accept the narratives of healing, but explain them away as having been effected by faith-healing. For the remaining miracles they adopt one or other of the theories already mentioned. In some cases they follow Paulus, and hold the event to have been in reality natural, but to have been misinterpreted. In other cases they hold the

miracle to be a myth. For others, again, they have recourse to the symbolical theory—a modification of the mythological theory—according to which the miracle story was invented to symbolize some theological or ecclesiastical teaching of the early Church.

Of this eclectic view Mr. J. M. Thompson, may perhaps be regarded as at present the most prominent English representative. His work *Miracles of the New Testament* (1911) naturally aroused a good deal of attention, as the author was by profession an Anglican clergyman. We shall here briefly summarize his main positions. At the outset it must be noticed that he takes for granted the views at present prevalent among the liberal critics regarding the composition of the Synoptic Gospels. The author of the first Gospel, he assumes, was not St. Matthew, but an unknown individual whose sources were St. Mark and Q. Where there is agreement between the Gospels, neither the pseudo-Matthew nor St. Luke add a shred of weight to the testimony of St. Mark; they merely copied out his work. They made, however, a good many minor changes; these are devoid of all authority. We have already pointed out that these views are in the highest degree dubious. Nevertheless we need not be surprised that Mr. Thompson treats them as ascertained facts. Critical theologians, as Schweitzer has told us, are wont to hold to their dogmas "with a tenacity beyond that of the Church itself."<sup>1</sup>

Mr. Thompson admits the early date of Mark

<sup>1</sup> *Quest of the Historical Jesus*, p. 85.

and Luke. He, further, grants that Mark was in all probability St. Peter's companion, and that he gives us the Petrine or apostolic tradition. Moreover he considers that his narrative conveys "a strong impression of unity and reality" (p. 20).

He deals with the miracles as follows. He divides them into visions, cures and wonders. The "visions" enumerated by St. Mark are the manifestations at the Baptism, the Temptation and the Transfiguration. It might have been thought that the evidence for the Transfiguration is exceptionally good, since St. Peter was himself present. But apparently that is not a point worth considering. "Nothing would be more probable," says Mr. Thompson, "than that Jesus with His intense faith in God, and His habit of visualizing cases of madness or epilepsy as possession by evil spirits, should, at the crises of His spiritual life, see visions . . . At the same time all our knowledge of the psychology of the spiritual life tends to show that there is nothing miraculous in such visions . . . There is no special intrusion of supernatural elements into the natural sequence of events. That is, there is no miracle." Visions are soon disposed of.

Next come the cures. Mr. Thompson supposes that "these incidents happened for the most part pretty much in the forms in which they are related" (p. vii.). We have already seen that he finds a sufficient explanation for them by "faith-healing." It would seem, however, that his attention had been directed by someone to Dr. Ryle's very striking article in the *Hibbert Journal*, April,



1907, in which the utter inadequacy of the preferred explanation was clearly shown. For in the Preface to his work he makes reference to this article, and tells us that, even if the symptoms as described by the evangelist do not look like those of neurotic disease, yet "the absence of any power of diagnosing disease . . . and the tendency at once to exaggerate the successes and to ignore the failures of the healing ministry of Christ, warn us against too literal an insistence upon the accounts as we have them." In plain language he tells us that if his conclusion cannot in any way be got out of the evidence which the Gospel supplies, then we must remember that it is the evidence which must give way: no question can be admitted as to the conclusion. This is a sufficiently startling claim for an investigator who declares that his enquiry is to be "purely evidential" (p. 5).

A special difficulty might be raised with regard to the emphatic testimony of St. Mark as to the vast number of miracles (Mk. vi. 56). Neurotic diseases are not found on a very great scale. But Mr. Thompson does not admit the difficulty. "Cases . . ." he tells us, "where no details are given, are of little evidential value, and may be ignored" (p. 34). And in reference to St. Matthew's repeated assertions to the same effect, taking the theory of the pseudo-Matthew for granted, he tells us that these are, "mere bits of literary joinery designed to round off the narrative" (p. 72).

It is next the turn of the wonders, viz.: the calming of the wind and sea, the raising of Jairus's



daughter, the feeding of the five thousand, the feeding of the four thousand, &c.

The storm, it is suggested, doubtless subsided naturally, and the disciples mistakenly attributed the subsidence to something Jesus had said. Jairus's daughter was not dead. Jesus, who really thought she was so, by a supreme act of faith sought to recall her to life, and she recovered at the appropriate moment. The feeding of the five thousand is more difficult of explanation. In all probability there was "some event the exact nature of which we cannot now determine," which the disciples really took for a miracle. This was altered and modified into its present form to serve as a symbol of the Eucharist. The feeding of the four thousand was a pure invention, since "it was natural to suppose that if Christ had done this once in Jewish territory, He must have done it also among the Gentiles." We do not think we are going too far in saying that it would be difficult to imagine anything more arbitrary and less like an "evidential enquiry" than all this. On these principles documentary evidence is merely so much plastic matter, which the critic's imagination may mould into any shape he pleases. The whole discussion is guesswork based on the principle, assumed to be self-evident, that miracles are impossible.

But beyond their sheer arbitrariness, the explanations offered involve us in a series of impossibilities quite as hard to admit as any miracle. One or two of these we shall point out. The Gospel of St. Mark is through and through supernatural. Incident after incident, saying after saying, represents our Lord

as a supernatural being possessed of thaumaturgic power. There is no possibility of distinguishing an original element, which is devoid of the miraculous, from subsequent miraculous accretions.<sup>1</sup> If then, as all admit, the Gospel contains the Petrine tradition, this was the view of Jesus Christ set forth by St. Peter himself, the view taught by the twelve. Here then we have a dilemma. If Christ worked no miracles, then Peter was either a prey to his own extravagant fancies, a man whose mind was out of all touch with reality and wholly unfitted for practical life, or he was an unscrupulous inventor. The latter hypothesis is maintained by none, and may be dismissed. What is to be thought of the former? Surely it is a patent absurdity. The test of a man is his work. It will hardly be disputed that Peter's work has proved very solid. Even those who reject Christianity as a religion, must admit that the man who laid the foundations of the Church in Rome knew how to build: that he was no visionary dreamer, but a man endowed above his fellows with powers to discern and to govern.

Again in some cases the explanation suggested supposes deliberate and conscious fraud, as for example in regard to the story of the feeding of the five thousand. Mark had not merely been associated with St. Peter towards the end of his life, but for more than a decade after the day of Pentecost he had lived in the closest contact with the Apostles.<sup>2</sup> His mother's house seems to have been

<sup>1</sup> Cf. Schweitzer, *Quest of the Historical Jesus*, p. 306.

<sup>2</sup> It was in the year 45 A.D. that Mark left Jerusalem with St. Paul and St. Barnabas on their first missionary journey.

their headquarters in Jerusalem (Acts xii. 12—17). If he did not hear this story from them, he must have known perfectly well that no such incident had ever occurred, that the whole tale was a pack of lies. Now apart from the psychological impossibility here involved, we have already shown how futile is any theory which supposes that a tissue of falsehoods could have been palmed off on the Christians of 70 A.D. These men were not collectors of fairy tales. They were men utterly convinced of an all-important reality—the stupendous fact that God had appeared on earth, had died and risen again. Regarding His earthly life they had heard from those who had lived with Him. They were in possession of the most authentic knowledge attainable. They would have rejected immediately whatever did not belong to the apostolic teaching.

Again, whether the work be attributed to hallucination or falsehood, the result is remarkable enough. For by some marvellous chance, this foolish record, as Mr. Thompson believes it to be, has pictured for us a character which for nineteen centuries has fired the enthusiasm of the noblest spirits of our race. And what is more, there is not a single incident or a single saying which is not in perfect harmony with all the rest. What a task to have achieved! To have drawn a picture of the God-man, at once omnipotent and human, and so to succeed that the work shows no flaw and has been recognized by the whole world as exceeding in interest and in beauty the greatest achievements of the poets! And yet the composition of the book

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is apparently without conscious art; it is merely a series of incidents and short discourses loosely strung together, with little attempt at any ordered sequence. Surely if this character was not drawn from the life the result is in itself a miracle. Yet the liberal critic asks us to believe that the original of the picture had no very special powers, and that the picture itself is a bungling affair which he can reduce to its right proportions.

A word must be said in conclusion as to Mr. Thompson's views of Matthew and Luke. Even when relating the same incident, the narratives of the evangelists, as is well-known, differ in point of detail. If we accept the traditional view that in St. Matthew's Gospel we have the record of an eye-witness, and that St. Luke had carefully collected independent testimony, this can occasion little difficulty. But Mr. Thompson takes another view. He holds that these writers had little regard for truth, and simply altered Mark to suit their doctrinal purpose. Indeed he undertakes to show that this was so, and that Matthew and Luke represent a later stage of the tradition. The proof he gives is very detailed, for he can explain the exact purpose with which each of these changes were made in the original account. It is impossible within our limits to discuss this argument. But it is worth calling attention to the fact that in its original form it was employed by D. F. Strauss to prove the opposite conclusion. Strauss held that Mark's Gospel was the last to appear, and he undertook to prove that these differences in points of detail pointed unmistakably to the fact that the author of Mark



had made a series of dishonest changes. Now that scholars tend to put Mark first, we are told that they point unmistakably the other way. There is surely some reason for concluding that an argument which faces either way according to the convenience of the critic is equally artificial and equally worthless in both cases.

## CHAPTER VII.

### ECCLESIASTICAL MIRACLES.

Ecclesiastical Miracles—Their Far-reaching Effects—  
Two Notable Examples: the Incorruption of St.  
Theresa's Body and the Cure of Pierre de Rudder—  
Miracles for which only Probable Evidence is Obtain-  
able—Legendary Accretions.

IT is a part of Catholic belief that miracles did not cease with the apostles, but are a permanent element of the supernatural dispensation established upon earth by Jesus Christ. This belief in ecclesiastical miracles is not a mere accidental feature with little bearing on any part of the dogmatic system, but is intimately connected with Catholic doctrine regarding the Church itself. For if the Church be, as Catholics hold, the temple of the Holy Ghost, the abiding-place on earth of God Himself, then it is as much to be expected that such supernatural manifestations should take place within it, as that they should have been a characteristic feature of the earthly life of our Lord. Those who accept the doctrine will have little difficulty in crediting the miracles, when they are supported by adequate evidence.

Again, from the point of view of history, these miracles form an integral part of Christianity. A history of the Church which should neglect them, would be a mutilated record, conveying a false impression of its subject. From the time of the apostles to the present day we have narratives of such events, written by those who claim either to

have witnessed them or to have received them on trustworthy authority: while in all periods the immense majority of Christians has held the fact of their occurrence to be beyond all question. A few instances may be cited by way of illustration. A contemporary letter from the presbyters of Smyrna to the Church of Philomelium, tells us of the miracles which marked the martyrdom of the aged Polycarp (Feb. 23, 155 A.D.). They write as eye-witnesses of the event, and tell us of the astonishment of the pagan onlookers. Some twenty years later the well-known letter of the churches of Lyons and Vienne, describing the fearful persecution which had just befallen them, relates how the deacon Sanctus, while undergoing torture for the second time, was miraculously healed of the horrible injuries inflicted upon him on the previous occasion. Towards the end of the same century, Irenaeus and Tertullian give ample testimony to the frequency of miracles in the Church and to the extraordinary power of the Christian exorcisms.<sup>1</sup> Origen in his polemic against the heathen Celsus, composed about 248 A.D., contrasts the miraculous powers exhibited in the Church with the futility of pagan magic: telling us moreover that he had himself witnessed the occurrences to which he alludes. "We have seen," he writes, "many set free from severe complaints and loss of mind and madness and numberless other such evils, which neither man nor devils had cured."<sup>2</sup> And testimony to the same effect might be cited

<sup>1</sup> Iren, *Adv. Haer.*, ii. 32. n. 4; Tertull, *Apol.* 23.

<sup>2</sup> Origen, in *Celsus*, iii. 24.



from other authors of the second and third centuries, such as Justin Martyr, Theophilus, Minucius Felix and Cyprian.<sup>1</sup> In the fourth century, St. Athanasius records for us the miracles of his master St. Anthony, whose life as an ascetic lasted from 270 A.D. to his death in 355 A.D. St. Augustine in his *De Civitate Dei*, lib. 22, relates a series of divine interpositions, some of them witnessed by himself: the most remarkable of these being the cure of the blind man Severus at Milan, which is likewise attested by two other eye-witnesses, St. Ambrose and Paulinus. St. Jerome is our authority for the miracles connected with the name of St. Hilarion (290—370). It is unnecessary to extend the list further. Examples might be drawn from every decade of Church history. But in regard to more recent times we may call attention to the events related of St. Francis Xavier's apostolate in India and Japan (1542—1552), and that of the Ven. Joseph Anchieta among the tribes of Brazil (1553—1597): and to those which are still occurring at the Grotto of Lourdes.

For the belief that these miracles form a permanent endowment of the Church, there is good warrant in the words of Christ Himself. The second Gospel records for us this final promise: "These signs shall follow them that believe; in my name they shall cast out devils; they shall speak with new tongues; they shall take up serpents; and if they drink any deadly thing it shall not hurt them. They shall lay hands on the sick, and

<sup>1</sup> Justin, *Apol.*, ii. 6; Theophilus, *Ad Auto.*, ii. 8; Min. Felix, *Octav.*, c. 27; Cyprian, *Ad Demetr.*, 15.

they shall recover " (Mk. xvi. 17, 18). This promise is not made to the apostles personally, but to the Church they are about to found, to "them that believe." Nor is there any suggestion that the gift is to last for a period only, and then cease. The words, taken in their obvious sense, signify that the Church shall never be without these manifestations of its supernatural character. And it is thus that the commentators understand them.<sup>1</sup>

Now, whatever view be taken of the events related as miraculous in Church history, there can be little doubt that they have been a potent force, both in converting the heathen and in confirming the faith of believers. This is sufficiently exemplified by the case of Lourdes. During the last half-century each year has seen the spot visited by many thousands of pilgrims. These have themselves witnessed, or at least have heard from others of the marvellous occurrences at the grotto. They have gone home with their faith in God and their belief in His presence in the Church rendered proof against all the fallacies of unbelief, and their influence in turn has been felt by many others who have never visited the place in person. Throughout this period these pilgrimages have been to the Catholic Church a veritable bulwark against that tendency to rationalism and to the rejection of the

<sup>1</sup> The wording of the promise leaves it doubtful whether the miraculous powers are at all times to belong at least to some few members of the Church, or whether all are to possess them. But inasmuch as the gift is for the good of the Church as a whole, and is in no way requisite for the salvation of the individual members, there is nothing to surprise us in the former proving to be the sense intended. *Vide* Maldonat., *in loc.*

supernatural, which has done so much to sap the foundations of religion in every non-Catholic body. It is, indeed, scarcely possible to exaggerate the effect which Lourdes has exercised in this direction. It has seemed to us imperative to call attention to the far-reaching influence of ecclesiastical miracles, in view of an argument not infrequently found in rationalist writings. It is employed by the well-known Positivist, J. Cotter Morrison, in his work, *The Service of Man*, and we give it in his words. "When no one," he writes, "doubted the possibility or the frequency of miracles, they abounded, we are told: that is, when by reason of their number and the ready credit accorded to them, their effect was the least startling, then they were lavished on a believing world. Now, when they are denied and insulted as the figments of a barbarous age, when the faith they might support is in such jeopardy as it never was before, when a tithe of the wonders wasted in Sinai and in the 'parts beyond Jordan' would shake the nations with astonishment and surprise—when in short the least expenditure of miracle would produce the maximum of result—then miracles mysteriously cease. This fact, which is utterly beyond contest, has borne fruit and will yet bear more" (*op. cit.* p. 29).

It will be seen that the writer assumes as a self-evident axiom that all modern miracles are fictitious. He makes a reference to the "compromising species made at Lourdes," but it clearly never crosses his mind that the alleged facts merited the slightest attention on the part of reasonable men.

This need not surprise us. Though a rationalist, he was writing under the influence of the great Protestant tradition which dominated England for three centuries, and which boldly asserted that Catholic miracles were one and all the result of fraud and superstition. But we may well feel surprise that he failed to see that the Lourdes miracles, whether real or not, were having precisely the effect which he says a miracle might be expected to have in an age of rationalism: that they bade fair to stem the rising tide of unbelief.

Indeed it is not merely on the faith of believers that these events have exercised a powerful influence. They have notably affected the rationalist attitude as well. Fifty years ago, those who rejected the Divinity of Christ, regarded His healing ministry as equally fabulous with the nature wonders. Now a complete change has taken place. They own that the miracles of healing took place "very much as they are recorded." And if we seek for the explanation of this change of front, we shall find it in the events of Lourdes and in those which took place at Treves during the exhibition of the Holy Coat in 1891.<sup>1</sup> The cures there were scientifically established and could not be denied. Hence it followed that it was very difficult to deny the possibility of the Gospel-cures. Doubtless an explanation of all these things was sought for in Charcot's theory of faith-healing. How futile that explanation was we have already seen.

The evidence for ecclesiastical miracles is, of

<sup>1</sup> Cf. Thompson, *op. cit.*, p. 40. For the older rationalist attitude, see Mill, *Essays on Religion*, p. 238.

course, of every degree of value. Some can show no other title to belief than popular report or old tradition. But in regard to many it may safely be said that they are established by testimony so adequate and so ample as to satisfy the most exacting requirements. Indeed if such evidence is rejected, then no fact in history can be reckoned as certain. It has long, no doubt, been customary among Protestants to reject them on *a priori* grounds. But those who adopt this standpoint would do well to consider with what consistency they can find fault with rationalists for adopting a similar method in regard to the Gospel miracles. If evidence ought to produce conviction in their case, it should have a like effect where ecclesiastical miracles are concerned.

We propose in the following paragraphs to deal with two cases in point, one drawn from the lives of the saints, and one an occurrence of recent times, viz., the miraculous incorruption of St. Theresa's body, and the cure of Pierre de Rudder, at Oostacker, Belgium. The former seemed a suitable instance owing to the number and character of the witnesses. De Rudder's case, as being the most notable miracle of the last century, could hardly be omitted.

In regard to St. Theresa our information is extremely ample. The formal process of canonization was commenced a few years only after her death, and depositions were taken from many persons who had been eye-witnesses of the events in question. These are summed up in the acts of canonization.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Bollandists, October, Tom. vii. p. 364, nn. 1115-1133.

The saint died at the convent of Alba de Tormes, Oct. 4, 1582, and was buried two days subsequently in the convent chapel. The body was not embalmed, nor was anything done with a view to its preservation. The foundress of the convent, Donna Teresa Laiz, foreseeing that efforts would be made to have the remains removed to Avila, determined if possible to prevent this. And to effect her purpose she arranged that the grave should be dug extremely deep, and the cavity filled in with earth, stones and mortar, the aperture being eventually closed by solid masonry. Nevertheless, from the time of the funeral, a rare fragrance constantly pervaded the chapel, and it was observed that this came from the tomb. It was eventually resolved to open the grave, and on July 4, 1583, after four days' labour the masonry and stones were broken through and the coffin was reached. It was found that both the coffin itself and the saint's clothes were much perished. But the body proved to be absolutely incorrupt, and moreover to be exuding an oil that gave forth a perfume of exquisite sweetness: the limbs were as flexible as in life. The body was then clothed afresh, and laid in the same tomb, but not at so great a depth. Two years later it was resolved in a General Chapter of the Order that the claims of the Avila convent must prevail, and in December, 1585, Fr. Jerome Gratian, the Provincial, opened the tomb once more, and found the body in precisely the same condition. The left arm was separated from the body and left at Alba, and the body taken to Avila. There it was solemnly exposed for veneration on Jan. 1,

1586. Among those who deposed to what they witnessed were Diego Yepes, bishop of Taragona, Francisco de Contreras, member of the king's privy council, Pablo Laguna, president of the council of the Indies, and Luis Vasquez, doctor of medicine. The last named testified that he satisfied himself by personal observation that none of the intestinal portions of the body had been removed: that he observed the incorrupt state, and the phenomenon of the fragrant oil; and further that to put the matter beyond all doubt, on different occasions he went unannounced to the convent to visit the sick, and asked when there to see the body; that he did this especially during the great heats; and that there was never the least change in the condition of the body; that both he and another doctor who had been among the witnesses on Jan. 1, 1586, were convinced of the miraculous character of the phenomenon. Bishop Yepes likewise gives a detailed account of the physical condition of the body. He mentions that the flesh if touched with the finger yielded to the pressure; and that when the pressure was removed it resumed its normal position as in life. He adds that not merely did the body itself exude the fragrant oil, but the same phenomenon was observed to take place as regards the arm, and as regards various small morsels of the flesh which had been distributed to a few people as relics.<sup>1</sup> The sacred remains rested at Avila only a few months. At the instance of the duke and duchess of Alba, Sixtus V ordered their restoration to that town. In

<sup>1</sup> Bollandists, *loc. cit.*, p. 345, n. 1042.

the years that followed, the tomb was more than once opened, and the same facts were observed by those who were privileged to be present: among them being various doctors who subsequently gave testimony on the subject. In 1604, an opening took place in the presence of the duke and duchess of Alba, the duke of Infantado and others. The duke of Infantado in his deposition affirmed that the absolute incorruption of the body, and the copious exudation of the fragrant oil, which he saw on that occasion, were to his mind so manifest a miracle, that had he not been already a Christian, these things would have sufficed to make him one.

The last occasion on which the tomb was opened was in the year 1760<sup>1</sup>. The purpose of the opening was to transfer the body to a magnificent silver shrine, the offering of King Ferdinand VI and Queen Maria Barbara. The royal benefactors had both died previous to the completion of the shrine, but their pious intention was carried out by the reigning King, Charles III. In the record of this opening there is no mention made of the phenomenon of the fragrant oil; we may therefore conclude that it had ceased. But it is stated that the body still showed no trace of corruption.

Here there can be no question of fraud. We hardly suppose that any could be found to suggest it in regard of the Alba Carmelites. But apart from this consideration, the medical testimony is overwhelming. It would be idle to appeal to unknown natural laws. The laws which are operative after death are perfectly well known to us. They

<sup>1</sup> Bollandists, *loc. cit.*, p. 426, n. 1428.



do not produce the effects we have described. On the other hand, if Almighty God from time to time bears testimony by miracle to the holiness of His saints, there is none in whose case such a miracle can occasion us less surprise. The sanctity of Theresa, the marvellous charm of her holiness, have won the admiration not only of her own co-religionists, but of Protestants and even of unbelievers.

Our second instance, the cure of Pierre de Rudder, occurred April 7, 1875, at Oostacker, a village some three miles from Ghent. At Oostacker there is a small sanctuary consecrated to Our Lady of Lourdes, much frequented by pilgrims from all parts of Belgium. It was here that the cure took place, and thus it is usually reckoned among the miracles of Lourdes.<sup>1</sup>

De Rudder was a farm-labourer living at Jabbeke in Western Flanders, on the estate of the Vicomte du Bus de Ghisignies. On Feb. 16, 1867, he was assisting two neighbours in the task of moving a tree which they had just felled, when the tree slipped from the lever with which they were raising it, and fell back upon him, crushing his left leg. He was attended by Dr. Affenaer of Oudenbourg, who found that he had sustained a compound comminuted fracture of the tibia and fibula some four inches below the knee. Dr. Affenaer set the bones,

<sup>1</sup> The literature relating to this miracle is copious. It is sufficient here to refer to *A Modern Miracle*, by A. Deschamps, S.J., M.D., trans. by F. Rankin, S.J. (Glasgow, 1906); *Lourdes*, by G. Bertrin, trans. by Mrs. P. Gibbs (London, 1908), pp. 164-184; *La Guérison subite d'une fracture, récit et étude scientifique*, par L. van Hoesenberghe, M.D., E. Royer, M.D., et A. Deschamps, S.J., M.D., Sc.D.

but every effort to obtain their reunion failed. A gangrenous sore formed at the seat of the fracture, and the ends of the bones could be seen swimming in pus. Moreover a fragment of dead bone had to be removed, so that there was a permanent gap of over an inch between the ends. Anti-septic methods were then unknown, and it proved impossible to stop the suppuration. Eventually Dr. Affenaer came to the conclusion that the case was hopeless. He and three other doctors who were called into consultation, advised amputation. Pierre however refused to give up hope and rejected the suggestion. For eight years he remained in this desperate condition, enduring great suffering. During this interval he was frequently visited by Dr. van Hoestenbergh, the parish doctor of Jabbeke, who looked in out of kindness, and not with any hope of benefiting the sufferer. His last visit was paid in Dec., 1874, when he found the wound in the same condition, and by a little pressure made the necrosed ends of the bones protrude from the wound. Pierre had long wished to make a pilgrimage to Oostacker, there to pray for a miraculous cure, but the old Vicomte du Bus, from whom he received a weekly allowance which kept him and his family from destitution, was incredulous as regards miracles, and told him not to make himself ridiculous. At this juncture, however, the old gentleman died, and Pierre resolved to visit the shrine on April 7th, on which day the Feast of the Annunciation (transferred) was being kept. At the cost of much intense pain he accomplished the journey, and, sup-

ported by his wife on one side and a charitable stranger on the other, he made the circuit of the grotto with the other pilgrims. Then he sank exhausted on to a bench and prayed that God would cure him and enable him to earn bread for his children.

Suddenly he felt a strong impulse to pray before the statue. He rose, forgetting his crutches, passed through the rows of pilgrims, and knelt in prayer. Not till he was kneeling there did he realize what his action meant. He was healed. The broken bones were united, the lost piece of bone was made good, the suppurating wound was gone. And this had been effected in an instant. It is thus that Dr. van Hoerstenberghe describes his cure in a private letter: "When Pierre de Rudder went on pilgrimage his leg had been broken and he had hobbled on crutches for more than eight years. The lower part of the leg and the foot hung like a rag. The same evening Pierre returned dancing, without his crutches. He had walked several miles, delighted to take an exercise he had been so long deprived of. Naturally, I went to see him, and I may tell you in confidence I did not believe in his cure. What did I find? A leg so perfect that if I had not examined it previously, I should have said it had never been broken."<sup>1</sup>

The impression made by the cure in the township of Jabbeke was profound. For all knew Pierre, and several of the neighbours had seen the

<sup>1</sup> Letter to Dr. Boissarie, cited in Bertrin, *Lourdes*, p. 184.

wound and the broken ends of the bones the day before. Among the conversions which resulted was that of Dr. van Hoerstenberghe himself. Previously a sceptic, he could not resist evidence such as this.

Dr. Deschamps cites the names of a number of doctors who have recognized the miraculous character of the event. Among others may be mentioned Dr. Masoin, professor of physiology at Louvain; Dr. Moeller of the Belgian Academy of Medicine; Dr. Lavrand, professor of the Faculty of Medicine at Lille. On Oct. 21, 1900, the cure was made the subject of discussion at a meeting of the Society of St. Luke, an association of Catholic doctors, at Paris. Casts of the bones taken after Pierre's death were exhibited. There were sixty-five members present, and they were unanimously of opinion that it was an evident and incontestable miracle.<sup>1</sup> Two London doctors who visited Belgium for the special purpose of examining the evidence have contributed letters to the same effect to the English translation of Dr. Deschamp's work. By way of contrast it is instructive to observe the method adopted by a disbeliever in the miraculous. A well-known English doctor in a paper contributed to the *British Medical Journal* (June 18, 1910), in which he seeks to explain away the miracles at Lourdes, refers to this case as the most notable and says: "There is no evidence to show whether the bones united in the first months after the accident; all that is said is that Peter could not

<sup>1</sup> Letter from Dr. Le Bec, of the Hospital of St. Joseph, cited in Sortais, *La Providence et le Miracle*, p. 177.

bear upon the leg." Surely a cause must be indeed weak which needs to be defended by misstatements so gross as this.

The same writer urges further that it was no less than four months since a doctor had seen the leg. This is true: Dr. van Hoerstenberghe's last visit had been in the December previous. But Pierre's neighbours had seen him constantly; they were able to depose that on the very day before the cure they had seen the broken bones protruding from the wound. Where facts of this kind are concerned, a witness needs no doctor's degree to guarantee his competence. Moreover, under any circumstances the complete cure of such a wound within four months would have been physically impossible. Even simple fracture of the upper extremity of the tibia is notoriously slow to heal. With the treatment in vogue in 1875, the cure of such a fracture when affected by suppuration would have required far more than four months. Moreover as part of the bone was lost, a natural cure would have left one leg shorter than the other. Finally, nothing could have been done unless the bone was set and the leg kept motionless. Pierre's leg was never set, but during the whole period he moved about on crutches.

The miracles we have related are but examples drawn from a vast number of similar cases. Dr. Boissarie's work on Lourdes contains a long list of cures scarcely less wonderful than de Rudder's, and the incorruption of St. Theresa's body is paralleled by many a circumstance told in the lives of the saints. We have a right to demand that

facts such as these should be duly considered and that those who reject miracles should endeavour at least to account for them. Only too often they prefer to ignore them altogether. But the facts and the evidence remain. And to employ Mr. Cotter Morrison's words: "they have borne fruit and will yet bear more."

Many, of course, of the miracles related in the lives of the saints are supported by far less evidence than those we have been considering. And it is often regarded as a positive fault in Catholics that they are ready to accept stories involving the supernatural on no better authority, it may be, than the word of a few peasants as to what took place when the saint was in their country. Thus, to take an example almost at haphazard: it is related of St. Francis Xavier that in 1544 in the neighbourhood of Cape Comorin, he healed a poor native whose body was covered from head to foot with ulcers. With his accustomed charity, we are told, he washed and dressed the sores of the poor man, and, as an act of voluntary mortification, he went so far as to drink some of the foul water he had used. Then he set himself to prayer, and forthwith the man was cured. In 1616, when an official enquiry was instituted with a view to his canonization, an aged Parava Christian, Gaspard de Miranda, made deposition on oath, that he had been present when the miracle was worked, and several other persons bore testimony that the fact had been related to them as absolutely true by Augustine de Pina, who at that time had been St.

Francis' native companion.<sup>1</sup> The evidence, it will be seen, is tolerably good. Presumably the ecclesiastical authorities regarded Gaspard as a trustworthy man, or they would not have accepted his deposition. But on the other hand, testimony given after so long an interval has not the same force that it would have had, had the enquiry been made shortly after the event occurred.

Now, of course, those who disbelieve in miracles will regard the story as a legend and consider the evidence for it worthless. They cannot do otherwise, for they hold a first principle which, erroneous as we esteem it to be, effectively rules it out. To them it is a thousand times more probable that the testimony should be false than that so inexplicable an event should have occurred. From their point of view, to believe the evidence of these natives would be the height of unreason.

Those, however, who start from different first principles may well judge otherwise. And the Catholic sees no *a priori* impossibility in miracles; he believes that from time to time they occur. He is aware, too, that Francis Xavier was a man of extraordinary holiness, one whose body, like that of St. Theresa, has by a manifest divine interposition been preserved from corruption; that from the time he began his apostolic ministry in India, he was by common report credited with miraculous powers, so that less than four years after his death the

<sup>1</sup> For the whole question of the miraculous powers of St. Francis Xavier, see the careful and critical *Vie de S. François Xavier*, by A. Brou (Paris, 1912), i. 219-226; ii. 430-441. The incident to which reference is made in the text is related i. 222.

high Portuguese officials of the colony came forward to bear witness to circumstances of this kind. In the case of such a man, an incident of the kind we have related possesses a certain amount of antecedent probability, and there seems little ground for an off-hand rejection of the testimony given by old Gaspard and his fellow-witnesses. No one would claim absolute certainty for the story. But we should be far more likely to err by rejecting it than by accepting it. The case is precisely the same as regards many of the incidents related in the biographies of eminent men. The biographer has what he regards as competent authority for them, and believes them to be true. And although they may not be beyond all possibility of question, we act reasonably in yielding credence to them.

The question as to whether any particular miracle-story is certainly true or only probable or even purely legendary, must be decided according to the ordinary principles of evidence. And here Catholics are free to form their own judgment. The Church does not impose belief in any ecclesiastical miracle. Even should a miracle find mention in the bull of canonization of some saint, this would but show that in the view of competent authorities there was good evidence for its occurrence. Undoubtedly this would give it a claim to respectful consideration; but it would by no means follow that an expert in such matters might not come to a contrary conclusion. It seems desirable to call attention to this, since certain non-Catholic writers have evidently laboured under a



misconception on the point. A well-known American rationalist<sup>1</sup> informs us that Pope Urban VIII imposed on all the faithful under pain of damnation a belief in the miraculous recovery of St. Francis Xavier's crucifix.<sup>2</sup> It may safely be said that this was the first that they had heard of the obligation.

It is clear that in judging as to the truth of these events, the Catholic is far more favourably situated than are those who disbelieve in the possibility of miracles. The latter come to the question with their decision already made. They have pronounced the verdict before they have heard the evidence. No matter how cogent the testimony may be, their mind is hermetically closed to it. The results to which this will lead have been illustrated for us in the criticisms of the de Rudder case from the *British Medical Journal*. Those who admit the possibility of miracles may certainly blunder from time to time; but at least they bring an open mind to the enquiry.

No one will deny that a large number of legendary miracles are to be found in the lives of the saints, especially in those of the early middle ages. When faith in the supernatural is strong and the general level of intellectual culture low, such stories inevitably grow up. It does not, however,

<sup>1</sup> Dr. A. D. White.

<sup>2</sup> The incident is well known. It is related that while blessing the waves during a dangerous storm that overtook him on his journey to Amboina (Jan., 1546), St. Francis Xavier let fall into the sea a crucifix which he greatly prized. The next day, while he was walking on the shore of the Isle of Ceram, a crab came towards him bearing the crucifix in its claw. The evidence for the story is given by P. Brou (i. 379); he declines to pronounce either for or against it.

follow because there are some legendary miracles, that there are no true ones. Yet it is not an uncommon controversial device to point to some of the stories which found credence in an uncritical age, and to say that they are representative specimens from which the character of all may be known. In this way Huxley made merry over the tales told by Eginhard, a contemporary of Charlemagne. It is of course far easier to employ this method than to deal with a solid mass of testimony given by qualified witnesses in the seventeenth, eighteenth or nineteenth century. But it is a method utterly devoid of argumentative value, and it can impose upon none save on the incautious and ignorant.

Here, then, we may bring our discussion of the question of miracles to a close. The subject is one of the highest moment, and in regard to which all compromise is impossible. For on this question hangs the issue between Naturalism and Supernaturalism. There can be no such thing as non-miraculous Christianity. If the physical universe is a closed system rigidly determined by laws which admit of no alteration, then it is only by a flagrant inconsistency that God can be held to interfere with the moral and spiritual order. The immutability of the one order involves the immutability of the other. We are brought inevitably to a doctrine of pure Naturalism. But if, as we have contended, the occurrence of miracles is an undoubted fact, then we possess a full assurance that the religion of Jesus Christ is, as it claims to be, a Divine revelation, God's greatest gift to man.

## APPENDIX.

### POSSESSION AND EXORCISM.

RATIONALIST writers take it for granted that the possessions of which such frequent mention is made in the New Testament and in early Church history, were mere cases of physical or mental disease, and that it was only the ignorance and superstition then prevalent which caused them to be attributed to diabolical agency. Speaking of the casting out of devils by our Lord, Dr. Estlin Carpenter says: "It is not necessary to point out that this explanation of nervous and other disorders belongs to the lower culture all round the world."<sup>1</sup> Mr. Thompson is equally decided to the same effect. He would have us believe that the so-called possessions were cases of madness, epilepsy or some other illness, and assures us regarding Christ's powers to deliver men from this evil, that "whether or not they were regarded as miraculous, they were not so in reality."<sup>2</sup> Now we may fairly claim that those who maintain this view should make some attempt to meet the evidence on the other side. The phenomenon which has throughout her history been regarded by the Church as possession, does not belong to the past only, but occurs at the present day. It displays certain definite features carefully described by the authors who treat of it. If it is so

<sup>1</sup> "Jesus or Christ." *Hibbert Journal Supplement* (1909), p. 233.

<sup>2</sup> *Op. cit.*, p. 37.

certain that every case of alleged possession is merely the result of disease, it should be shown that disease is capable of producing these particular effects. The mere fact that some savages consider madness to be diabolical possession is worthless as an argument. We are concerned not with what savages hold to be possession, but with what is considered by the Church to be such. The *Rituale* in its brief directions to the exorcist signalizes the following as the most noteworthy symptoms: to speak some language hitherto altogether unfamiliar; to be aware of what is taking place at a distance; to reveal secret matters; to display physical force beyond what is naturally possible.<sup>1</sup> When these signs or others similar, it says, are found *in conjunction*, they constitute a very strong argument that the case is one of real possession. Doubtless possessions are of rare occurrence in Christian countries, though they are far from being unknown. Thus in 1902, attention was drawn by several of the French papers to a case at Grèzes in the department of Aveyron. When they do occur, these are the features which characterize them: and unless these or some equally extraordinary symptoms were present, exorcism would most certainly not be employed.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> "Signa autem obsidentis daemonis sunt: ignota lingua loqui pluribus verbis, vel loquentem intelligere: distantia et occulta patefacere: Vires supra aetatis vel condicionis naturam ostendere: et id genus alia: quae cum plurima occurrunt, majora sunt indicia."

<sup>2</sup> Several interesting cases of possession displaying these features may be found in the article "Possessions diaboliques" (by Dr. G. J. Waffelaart) in Jaugé's *Dictionnaire Apologétique de la Foi Catholique* (Paris, 1889).

It will scarcely be contended that madness or epilepsy will produce these effects. Nor is it easy to see what explanation is possible except that put forward by the Church, viz., that an alien spirit has entered into the body of the person affected, and that this invading personality has the power to control his external actions and even his other faculties, so far as they depend on bodily movement of any kind.

It is surely remarkable that a rationalist writer should undertake to explain on our behalf the true nature of possession, and should make not the slightest reference to these phenomena even by way of refutation. Yet as a typical instance of an alleged possession in modern times, Mr. Thompson thinks it sufficient to relate an anecdote contained in John Wesley's *Journal*, concerning a frantic woman who seems to have imagined herself possessed for a day or two, but who certainly displayed no signs which would justify others in taking that view.

It is often urged that in past centuries the belief in possession led to many horrible cruelties; that till comparatively recent times, both in Catholic and Protestant countries, many a poor idiot or epileptic was regarded as possessed and subjected to the atrocious tests then in vogue. We have no need to deny this. When manners are rough and barbarous, and belief in the supernatural is strong, such abuses are likely enough to occur. But it is difficult to see how such incidents tend to disprove the fact of possession, when adequate evidence is forthcoming.

It would be beyond the scope of this work to enter on a full discussion of the question, which moreover, does not, strictly speaking, belong to the miraculous properly so called. Moreover, the subject is treated in books which are easily accessible.<sup>1</sup> But we reproduce here the account of an exorcism communicated in January, 1909, to the pages of *Rome*<sup>2</sup> by Mgr. Delalle, vicar-apostolic of Natal. Apart from the fact that the events related are of recent occurrence, Mgr. Delalle's reputation for sagacity and for sanity of judgment give it a special interest.

"Two months ago I promised the editor of *Rome* a relation of certain facts which happened in my vicariate last year (May, 1907), concerning two native girls (Germana and Monica), whom I believe to have been possessed by the devil. I shall simply relate the facts without a word of comment, and shall content myself with vouching for their absolute truth. If anyone thinks differently from me on the subject, he is quite free to do so: I mean, provided he admits the facts, he may draw his own conclusion.

"There is in the vicariate of Natal a mission now in charge of the Trappist Fathers, where a great deal of good is done, although it was a long time before any results could be seen. This mission is dedicated to St. Michael, and is about twenty miles from the nearest village, the magistracy of Umginto.

"For several months I was constantly receiving letters from the priest in charge of St. Michael's, in which he declared that two girls of the mission native school were possessed by the devil, and asked for permission to practise the solemn exorcisms. After some time I allowed him

<sup>1</sup> See, e.g., Görres, *La Mystique, Divine, Naturelle et Diabolique*, French trans. (Paris, 1862). De Bonniot, *Le Miracle et ses Contrefaçons* (Paris, 1895).

<sup>2</sup> An English magazine published at Rome.

to do so, and things were quieter for a little while, but soon the distressing phenomena appeared worse than before. I was very much annoyed and hardly believed it was a case of possession, but rather put it down to hysterics. Unable to go at the time, I gave permission to the Abbot of Marienhill either to go himself or to delegate a priest who would inquire into the facts and if necessary exorcise the girls. But a few days after, I found I could go myself and wrote to St. Michael's telling the priest to expect me."

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"I was very uncertain yet and called the priests (three Trappists) and also the Sisters, and asked them some particulars about the ways of these girls. Here are some of the things they told me:—

"They carry enormous weights, which two men could hardly lift (the girls are about sixteen years old); they understand Latin when in their fits, and even speak it sometimes; they reveal the secret sins of the school-children, &c.; sometimes they are lifted off the ground in spite of the Sisters holding them; a few days before, whilst the Sisters were holding Germana, she shouted 'I am on fire!' The Sisters withdrew and saw the girl's dress ablaze. Another time her bed began to burn also, though there was no fire near by, and so on.

"It was getting very serious, and the poor Sisters, weary of this terrible life, begged of me to help them. After all this I thought it was my duty to begin the solemn exorcisms. I ordered therefore the four priests and three Sisters to be ready to begin at 2 p.m. in the Sisters' Choir, and excluded everyone else from the church. Just before the time I had the Holy Water font emptied and filled with plain water, whilst I took a small bottle of Holy Water in my pocket. Then I put on the rochet and mozetta, and waited for Germana.

"The Sisters brought her into the chapel, and I sprinkled her at once with water *from the font*. At first she looked up with a slight shudder, but as I continued she laughed mockingly, and cried: 'You may go on, this is not Holy Water!' Then I took the bottle out of my pocket and sprinkled her anew, but this time she shrieked and cried, and asked me to stop.

"Now I must remark that *all the time while the ordeal lasted I spoke Latin only*, the girl obeying all my orders and answering me, usually in Zulu, but sometimes in Latin.

"After some prayers I asked her: '*Dic mihi quomodo voceris*?' To which she replied: '*Dic mihi nomen tuum*!' I insisted, and she said: 'I know your name, it is Henry; but where did you see that spirits have names?' 'They have, and I command you to tell me yours.' 'Never, never!' But on my placing on her head a relic of the true cross, which she could not see, 'Take that away,' she cried, 'it crushes me!' 'What is it?' 'A relic.' 'Then now tell me your name.' 'I cannot; but I will spell it: D-i-o-a-r.' 'Now, who is your master?' 'I have none.' 'But you have one, and must tell me his name.' 'I cannot; but I shall write it.' And she wrote with her finger: 'Lucifer.'

"'Now,' I said, 'Tell me why you were cast out from heaven.' 'Because God shewed us His Son made man, and commanded us to adore Him; but we would not, because He had taken to Himself an inferior nature.'

"Whilst I was going on with the prayers of the ritual, she (should I not say *he*? however, you understand); interrupted me constantly, objecting to all the invocations. When I read extracts from the Gospels, she suddenly exclaimed: 'I know Matthew, I do not know Mark.' 'This is an untruth, and to make up for it kneel down at once.' This she did. Whilst we recited the *Magnificat*, she interrupted again: 'Stop it, I know it better than you, I knew it long before you were born.'

"As one of the Fathers commanded her to be quiet, she turned on him: 'You fool! who gave you authority over me? Did the bishop or the abbot delegate you?'

"At times she remained quiet and disdainful, but sometimes she raged and gnashed her teeth. 'I'll make you sweat before I get out,' she said once: then all of a sudden, she asked to be allowed to go into another girl, Anastasia. 'Stop your prayers,' she said also, 'they hurt me. If you stop, I shall go out to-morrow morning.'

"Time went on, and as I was tired, I commissioned one of the priests to read the prayers for me. He did so, but with a droning voice. As he stopped at the end of a



paragraph, she turned fiercely upon him: '*Exi immunde spiritus!*' she said.

"From time to time she went into awful fits of roaring. On such occasions, I had only to place two fingers lightly on her throat, and she could not utter a sound. To make a counter-experiment, I asked one of the Sisters to do the same as I did, but it had no effect. 'Tell me,' I said, 'why you are so much afraid of the priest's fingers?' 'Because,' she answered, 'they are consecrated,' and she made the motion of the bishop anointing the priest's hands at his ordination. We went on thus from 2 p.m. till 9 p.m., when I decided to stop till the following morning.

"Afterwards, Germana was somewhat quieter, and she came begging me not to give her up. 'I am sure,' she said, 'that if you said your Mass for me to-morrow it would be easier.' 'Yes,' I answered, 'I shall, but on condition that you will go to confession and communion to-morrow morning.'

"The night was awful, and the poor Sisters had to remain with her all through. She went to confession and communion in the morning, and remained quiet until, at 8.30 a.m., we began the exorcisms again. From the very first words, she became unmanageable, and we had to tie her hands and feet, since eight of us together could not control her.

"'You have sent away Anastasia,' she cried, 'I can see her with another girl on their way to another mission, but I'll find her again.' It was true. Early in the morning I had sent her away, but Germana could not possibly have known it. After a while someone called a priest away: he came back half an hour later. 'Where has he been?' I asked. 'He went to baptize a man who got sick suddenly.' That was also true, but nobody in the chapel knew it. Then she asked for a drink, and one of us fetched her a cup of water. After drinking some of it, she stopped: 'Wretched man,' she said, 'you gave me Holy Water!' Still, I made her drink the whole of it, and she became quite defiant. 'All right, give me more still; it will not make me suffer more than I do.'

"It would be too long were I to repeat everything she said. Suffice it to say that every moment it became more

and more awful, until at last she tried to bite a priest. He, somewhat excited, gave her a little tap on the mouth, at which she became worse and called him the most stupid of men, who wanted to strike a spirit.

"As I commanded her to keep quiet, she cried: 'Now, no more obedience!' It was the end evidently, but the struggle was terrible. At last she fell to the floor, and moaned with awful pains. Her face swelled up suddenly, so that she could not even open her eyes, and the tears came down her cheeks. But the sign of the cross brought the face instantly back to the natural size. Then a kind of convulsion, and she remained motionless as if dead: *locus vero foetore redolebat*. After about ten minutes, she opened her eyes, and knelt down to thank God. 'Dioar' had gone.

"This is the summary of what happened to Germana. If anyone can explain the signs, the symptoms, the words and the cure otherwise than by possession, he will be more clever than I am. I shall perhaps relate some other time the case of Monica, and in the meantime I give the editor of *Rome* leave to do with this what he likes. I have in my possession a letter sent me by Germana afterwards, in which she begs that I will pray for her death. She has seen too much and is afraid of life."

We referred above to a possession which occurred in 1902 at Grèzes, near Soissac, in the south of France. As this case took place nearer home and in a Christian country, it also seems to deserve some mention. The facts, so far as they became public in an authentic form, may be briefly summarized. It is scarcely to be expected that we should obtain a detailed account of such cases. Diabolic possession in a household is a circumstance which its members would wish to be forgotten as soon as possible. However, owing to the flood of erroneous reports which had found their way into the papers, an ecclesiastic acquainted with

those concerned communicated to Mgr. Méric, professor at the Sorbonne, a somewhat reserved statement on the subject, which the latter published in the *Revue du monde invisible* for August, 1902. From this we gather that the features of the case were very similar to those which characterized the possession of the girl Germana. The sufferer, though a woman of humble parentage, who could only speak French and her native patois, was able, during the attacks, to understand Latin, and even to speak it. She instantly recognized whether water had been blessed or not. The presence of a consecrated Host excited her to frenzy; but when an unconsecrated host was brought into the room with precisely the same ceremonial, she remained altogether unconcerned.

Rationalist writers apparently regard facts such as these as altogether undeserving of their attention: and for the most part neglect even to mention them. Yet the evidence for their occurrence is plentiful, and may be drawn from almost any century of the Church's history. And it is difficult to see how they can be explained otherwise than as the Catholic Church has at all times explained them.

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